

THE FIVE CENT

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FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE ST., N. Y.
NEW YORK, December 13, 1895.

{ PRICE }
{ 5 CENTS. }

Vol. II.

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JACK HARKAWAY AND THE CONVICTS.



The chief of the bushrangers turned to his men, and quietly said: "If I catch them lying to me, I will nod my head as a signal for you to shoot them both through the heart."

JACK HARKAWAY AND THE CONVICTS.

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN TWO OLD FOES MEET FACE TO FACE.

THE Harkaways made up their minds to travel up the country, beyond the last station upon the big river.

"We have exhausted every possible style of locomotion," said old Jack, when they were discussing the particulars of the project; rail, boat and horseback, but it will be a new sensation to voyage by caravan."

"So it will."

"We can have a saddle-horse or two for those who wish to distinguish themselves before the ladies."

"Mr. Mole, for instance," suggested Dick.

The old gentleman turned sharply around.

"Not so much of your chaff, Mr. Harvey, if you please," said he; "I have shown to as good advantage in the saddle as most people here present."

Old Jack started again.

"You had a good seat, Mr. Mole?" he said, innocently.

Mr. Mole smiled in a pitying manner.

"You haven't heard much about horses at your early period of life, my dear Jack," he said, "or the name of Mole would have sounded familiar in your ears as household words," as the poet says, in connection with the equine race."

"You surprise me," said Harvey, pretending to take it all in.

"I had a pony once that would take a five-barred gate—"

"For supper?" suggested Dick, innocently.

"No, sir, at a leap."

"And where would it take the five-barred gate to?" demanded Harvey.

"I mean clear it."

"Clear it," repeated Dick. "Why, you talk of a pony as if it were a cask of wine; and what is the object of clearing a pony?"

"Rubbish!" cried Mr. Mole, furiously.

"What a singular object," said the imperturbable Dick. "And do you employ white of eggs or steel filings?"

"Bah!" yelled Mole, savagely, while the rest of the company were trying vainly to suppress their mirth; "you pretend not to believe it, but you know well how true it is, for you remember the pony well."

"Of course I do!" exclaimed Dick, "well, indeed; it was a native of Jerusalem."

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the listeners.

And this put an end to Mole's anecdote.

* * * * *

The preparations for the new journey were necessarily long and costly.

They had eight large wagons horsed with stout teams and well provisioned.

They had to hire several servants, and for these, according to custom, they went to the prison, where there are always a number of men on hire among the discharged convicts or men who by good conduct have earned their tickets of leave, and among the number were two in whom we take a certain interest.

"No. 4,093!" was called out by one of the warders attending upon the chaplain.

"Here, sir."

And No. 4,093 marched meekly out, looking the very picture of innocence—according to the Botany Bay point of view.

"4,112."

"Here."

"That's a big, fine fellow," said Harkaway, as the last called stepped forth.

"What offense was he sent here for?" asked Harvey.

The registers were searched and the answer brought.

"Robbery from the person with great violence."

"Humph!" said Jefferson, "It's rather a dangerous fellow to have about one. I think that we could dispense with him."

No. 4,112 heard it and he scowled at the speaker.

"Did you notice his look?" said Jefferson, eagerly.

"Not particularly," replied Harkaway.

"It was a familiar look, I thought," said Jefferson, reflectively.

"I know that I have seen that face somewhere," he kept muttering to himself, "but where—where?"

Those men were disguised so effectually by the prison barbers, and by the convict's flannel garb, that few persons could have traced any resemblance to those men as they appeared before their trials.

4,112 had worn his hair long and bushy, and beard of raven blackness.

Now, when this man was closely cropped and had his beard and mustache shaved off, it will readily be understood why he was effectually disguised.

The other convict, No. 4,093, walked after him.

"That big fellow doesn't appear to be altogether reformed," said Jefferson, to the chaplain.

"I will go after him and see what it means," said the chaplain.

* * * * *

The two convicts walked away, No. 4,112 looking as black as thunder.

No. 4,093 was more careful—more guarded in his manner.

Coming up with his fellow prisoner, he gave a sharp glance about him to ascertain that they were out of earshot, and then he said:

"Toro, my pippin; you've made a nice mess of it."

"Bah!"

"What do you mean by showing your temper to the strangers?"

"Strangers?"

"Yes, those people."

"Is it possible you don't remember?"

"I don't see how I can remember people that I never saw before in all my life."

The Italian convict burst out laughing.

"Well—well, Bigamini," he cried, laughing still, "I gave you credit for a better memory."

"Who the deuce are they? Why don't you tell me at once?"

"Don't you know the name of Jack Harkaway?"

Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet he could not have looked more startled.

Yet, no sooner was the name pronounced, than he remembered all the faces well.

He had not expected to see any of that party there—indeed, his thoughts had been anywhere but upon the Harkaways—else he might have recognized them.

"You will bear in mind, too, that he had not seen the Harkaways so lately as Toro had."

"It gives me quite a turn," said Bigamini.

"Why?"

"Why! Why, couldn't they make it precious hot for us both?"

"Of course they could," returned Toro; "but I think they will never know us. The only course is to avoid them, for did they but say half a word to the governor about all we have done in various parts of the world, we should never have half a chance of a ticket."

Number 4,093 pulled the wryest possible face.

"Dear—dear, Toro," he exclaimed, ready to weep. "After all my trouble, too."

Toro grinned.

But his grin was savage, and made his companion jump back.

"No sniveling here, you watering pot," he said, "or I'll give you something—"

"Hush!"

"What is it?"

"The chaplain behind us."

Immediately the two convicts fell into their old parts of the reformed convicts.

The chaplain approached them slowly.

"My friends," he said, gently, "I fear you have not the strength to wrestle with evil inclinations. Why did you leave so abruptly?"

"He is very sorry now, sir," said Number 4,093.

"Why did you leave?"

"To follow him," said Bigamini; "to help him if I could with a word of hope and comfort. That, sir, was my desire."

"You are a good fellow," said the chaplain.

"I hope that your reward may come soon."

And Number 4,093 shook his head meekly as if deprecating the compliment.

"My brother in sin and misfortune," he said, indicating Toro by a gesture, "knew those people."

Toro gave a start.

"Basta—basta!" he exclaimed, in alarm.

But Bigamini never heeded his warning.

"Knew the visitors?" said the chaplain in surprise.

"Yes."

"No—no," ejaculated Number 4,112; "he is mistaken, sir. I do not say that—"

The chaplain looked from one to the other inquiringly.

"He does not care to own it, sir," said Number 4,093, "but it's the truth. That man was his worst enemy. He has pursued him remorselessly through life. His great riches have enabled him to dispose pretty much as he liked of his enemies, my unhappy brother among the rest."

The clergyman looked greatly shocked.

"It is very sad, but I will seek them and reason with them, and perhaps when they know your name, my good friend—"

"You must not, sir," said Bigamini to the chaplain; "they are cruel, and although they would speak fairly to your face, they would be sure to work against him in secret."

"Well—well, as that is the case," responded the reverend gentleman, "I will not."

"Thanks, oh, thanks, sir. Heaven bless you."

The clergyman turned away, and strolled thoughtfully out of hearing.

"What an impatient fellow you are," said Bigamini.

"You alarmed me."

"But there was no other explanation for it, don't you see. He's soft on certain questions, but the parson isn't altogether a fool."

"Do you think you may rely upon his silence?"

"Certain."

Now they came to the boundary of the exercise ground which adjoined the road, and just as they arrived here, they were greeted by the deep baying of dogs.

A moment more and two men of color came past, each holding a pair of strong, and fierce-looking bloodhounds.

"Fine dogs, mister," said Bigamini.

"Very fine," responded one of the darkeys.

"They hunt the niggers with them across the Atlantic," said Toro, brutally.

One of the darkies, who was once known as Julius Cæsar Augustus Hannibal Jex, and who curiously enough was introduced to these pages on a rumpus with the convict No. 4,112, turned sharply upon the speaker.

"Mind they ain't put on your trail, mister jail bird," he said, viciously; "they mightn't find a convict's flesh as dainty as a nigger's, but I'se blessed if they wouldn't gnaw properly."

Toro made a savage retort, and would have committed himself imprudently had not Bigamini taken him by the arm, and dragged him away.

"Don't be quite so familiar, Bigamini," growled Toro.

"Hush!" don't you recognize those two niggers?"

"No—yes, of course, they must be Harkaway's black devils. I shouldn't have remembered them. Niggers and babies always appear exactly alike to me."

He turned around to look at the black men Sunday and Monday, for of course it was our faithful old friends whom the convicts had recognized, and he saw that Sunday was pointing him out to his companion.

"Come away, Bigamini," exclaimed Toro, anxiously. "We are recognized by those devils. Come along."

"I don't think so."

"Don't you? Look back; see, they are pointing to us still."

They were, too.

The pair of darkeys had not been able to fathom the mysteriously familiar appearance of the convicts, but they were getting upon the scent.

"Confound them," ejaculated Toro, impetuously. "I should like to see them—"

"I know," interrupted Bigamini, impatiently. "But don't waste time in curses. This is the moment for action, not words."

It was in truth a serious job for the convicts, for reasons that the reader cannot fail to appreciate.

"Something must be done, and that promptly, too."

"True, for if they have not recognized us to-day, they will, and once let all the truth be known, you may look to the full term of your sentence as a certainty."

"Yes, and fresh warrants to be handed to you the day you step out of prison."

If they remained here, they risked discovery daily.

Harkaway would be certain to return to the place for the domestics and laboring men that he was to take upon the chaplain's recommendation to his new settlement up the country.

* * * * *

"Bigamini," exclaimed Toro, stopping suddenly, "we must bolt."

Number 4,093 grinned.

"When?"

"To-night."

"I don't say it will be easy; all I say is that it will have to be done. If we are recognized, we are lost. Better to risk all and bolt."

"Very good," answered No. 4,093. "I'm agreed."

"When we hear the bell toll two," said Toro, "glide to the dormitory window; you will find it open."

"Open?"

Toro nodded.

"It is always barred."

"It will not be to-night, for I have removed the screws of the bar. It comes out bodily, you see," he added, significantly, "and may be handy in case of any one getting in our way."

Bigamini grew slightly alarmed.

"No violence," he said.

"I shall be prudent; only let 'em beware of stopping us, that's all."

The look of fierce menace in his face made Bigamini tremble, and for a moment he half regretted being concerned in this job.

However, it is certain that he had feared Toro more than anything or any one else.

He dared not retreat.

* * * * *

All was silent in the convict dormitory.

At either end of the long chamber in which the convicts slept were warders dozing in their chairs.

But it was cat-like sleep, and at their right hands were bell-pulls, the lightest touch of which would alarm the whole settlement.

No easy matter therefore for a prisoner to escape.

The deep-toned bell of the prison tolled two sonorous notes.

A faint rustling might be heard in the dormitory, and two dark forms glided like phantoms to the window.

The shutter was barred heavily, and upon the right the bar was fixed to the staples by a padlock of which each warder kept a key.

But the padlocks and the staples were all alike useless.

The bar came away bodily.

The window was pushed gently open, and each of the two men threw a leg over prior to dropping down.

Suddenly a sound was heard, which startled them not a little.

The tramping of military men.

"Hush!"

"What now?"

"They are going to relieve guard."

"Quiet."

The marching of the soldiers grew nearer and nearer, until it ended beneath the window.

Immediately below them was a sentry-box, and the sentinel there was to be removed.

The challenge of the officer of the watch was heard distinctly.

The guard was changed.

The soldiers marched off, and the regular tramping died away in the distance.

"Now's our chance; for life or death," cried Toro.

"Quickly," said the other, looking pale and trembling with fear.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLIGHT—THE SENTRY BAGGED—ALARMING SOUNDS—HUNTED BY BLOODHOUNDS.

Now the spot where the two convicts leaped from the window was close over the sentry-box.

Toro being less agile than his companion, he dropped fairly upon the top of the box, and the weight of his huge body made it sway forward.

Judge then of the amazement of the sentry who had only just been placed there.

The tramp of the patrol was just dying in the distance, when down flopped a man like magic before his box, and almost at the same instant the sentry received a shock, and the box was toppled over.

Down it fell with a crash, trapping the sentry in a way that was comical in the extreme, or it

would have been had it been a trifle less alarming.

Toro rolled upon the ground, and Bigamini looked half dead with fright.

"Oh, golly," he moaned; "it's all up."

Toro scrambled up.

"Don't be a fool," he said, savagely. "He's safe. I'm more damaged than any one, and I can walk, you see."

"Look."

"Where?"

"His gun."

Bigamini pointed to the barrel of the sentry's musket, which was projected beneath the edge of the sentry-box, and as it was moving backwards and forwards, there was every reason to suppose that the sentinel, like themselves, was a good deal more frightened than hurt.

"Hush!" exclaimed Toro, warningly, "we must have that or his life."

"The gun?"

"Yes."

"Gently does it," said Bigamini.

Toro stooped and made a grab at the barrel of the gun.

But just as he got hold of it it rattled in his grasp, and a loud explosion followed.

It had gone off.

The fright of the two convicts at this was something great.

During the momentary stillness that reigned immediately after the explosion, they looked about them eagerly, expecting to be pounced upon at once.

But an alarm is not always so quickly taken.

It required some few minutes for the prison authorities to realize the full significance of the noise.

But when they did get some insight into the events which had occurred, there was a general alarm created.

Then the alarm bell was rung.

There were guns firing and a general excitement, while an elaborate search was made, for they could not at once discover whence the mischief came.

Thus it fell out that before they were upon the scent the fugitive convicts, numbers 4,093 and 4,112, were far off.

"We must keep to the river," said Bigamini, "and we are saved."

"Don't be too sanguine as yet," responded Toro.

"Do you think we shall be taken?" demanded Bigamini, in trembling accents.

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"Silence, fool!" ejaculated the Italian, savagely. "Don't worry me. If you do anything that may endanger us, I shall think nothing of putting you out of the way."

"Ugh!"

Bigamini knew his companion of old.

He knew too well that Toro was not the man to hesitate even at murder.

He would look upon removing him—Bigamini—from his path with as much coolness as disposing of an enemy.

This was not a pleasant companion truly.

* * * * *

"This way. Follow me closely," exclaimed Toro.

"Consider me there," responded Bigamini.

By this time the pursuit had grown unpleasantly hot, and they speedily realized one important fact.

They must throw the pursuers off the track before daybreak, or they would be lost.

Once let them get an idea of their route and good-bye to their chance of safety.

The night was dark and progress difficult.

But Toro consoled himself for this on reflecting that it made the pursuit equally difficult.

Their only object was to gain the river.

Once there, they kept along as close to the bank as they could.

Toro led, and he went the pace in his dashing, fearless way, while Bigamini followed him as closely as his fears would allow him, for the danger of falling into the river was by no means inconsiderable.

Several miles of ground were covered in this way, until Toro, who led some distance ahead of his squeamish comrade, was suddenly brought to a standstill by a cry of pain and terror proceeding from Bigamini.

"Hold your noise, you idiot!" he exclaimed, savagely. "Do you want to bring them down upon us?"

"Oh!"

"Where are you?"

"Here?"

"How far?"

"Come and lend us a hand, like a good pal. I've stuck in an 'ole, and damaged one of my legs, I think."

A fresh cry of pain, louder even than the first, brought the Italian up to him with a run.

He found that Bigamini had slipped upon the bank where there was a sudden and steep declivity, and that, although a good deal more frightened than hurt, yet he had really sustained some damage.

"Do you think you have broken your leg," demanded Toro, stretching over to him.

"Yes," answered Bigamini, eagerly, for he thought to elicit a word of sympathy from his boorish comrade.

"If that's the case, you are no good for this job."

"Wuss luck!" groaned the convict, piteously.

"Then I'll tell you what I had better do for you."

"Yes—yes," said Bigamini, eagerly. "What, old pal?"

"I had better drop you into the water. I don't want you left there howling, for you'll put them upon the scent; and I don't want that. So here you go to the bottom of the river."

"Don't be a brute," cried the convict, awfully frightened at this; "lend us a hand and pull me up."

Toro stretched out, and succeeded in dragging his companion up on to *terra firma*.

The march was resumed; Bigamini being only a slight limp the worse for his fall, until Toro decided to rest for the night.

"We shall be fresher after a little sleep," said he, "and they'll never get as far as here to-night."

* * * * *

Morning dawned, and found the two escaped convicts fast asleep upon their backs, with the early sun pouring its fiery rays on to their faces.

But they were so thoroughly done up by their exertions of the previous day, that they slept like tops notwithstanding.

After a certain time Toro opened his eyes.

He stared about him, and then he started as a distant sound struck on his ear.

Evidently the sound alarmed him.

At first he sat upright and listened intently, and then down he stretched upon the ground and listened with his ear to the earth.

An expression of alarm flitted across his countenance.

Yet we must give him the credit to acknowledge that it was only momentary, and was speedily replaced by a look of settled resolution.

"Bigamini," he exclaimed, kicking his companion with unpleasant vigor.

"Halloo!"

"Get up."

"Eh, anything wrong?"

"Yes," answered Toro, sharply; "very wrong indeed."

His manner helped as much as the kick to arouse his companion.

"What can it be, Toro?" he exclaimed, an uneasy feeling stealing over him.

"Listen," was Toro's reply.

Bigamini obeyed, and when he caught the sound that had aroused Toro so thoroughly, he turned pale.

"It's dogs!"

Toro nodded.

"Yes."

"Hounds!"

"That's it," answered Toro, in the same manner. "Bloodhounds, and on our track, too. What do you think of that, Bigamini?"

The convict's lips grew livid with fear.

"Oh, Toro—Toro," he faltered, "you are never going to give in. You won't bottle up."

"What?"

"Don't be violent. I say you will fight it out, won't you? You ain't a-going to cry peccavi yet awhile, are you?"

"I am going to kill you, perhaps," answered Toro, in a voice of calm ferocity, which thrilled his companion most unpleasantly.

"Oho!"

"Get up."

"I will—I will!" shrieked Bigamini, springing to his feet as Toro helped him with a kick.

"Follow me."

"Yes—yes."

They made their way on as fast as they could, but at every stride the deep baying of the hounds sounded nearer and nearer.

They were gaining upon the fugitives rapidly. It was serious now.

The two convicts struggled on at a desperate rate.

Yet what could they do in a race with those fierce four-footed beasts?

"They will tear us piecemeal," exclaimed Bigamini, "if once they come up with us."

"There's no fear of that," answered Toro; "they are only put on the track to guide our pursuers by their keen scent. On with you."

"Oh!"

"Cur that you are; the dogs are held in."

Bigamini looked around over his shoulder and gave a cry, or rather a gasp, of fright.

"Look."

Toro turned sharply around, and there, a hundred yards behind them, were four blood-hounds bounding along with their heads to the ground.

They were alone.

Not a human soul in sight.

"They have followed the trail," said Toro, rather thickly, "and the keepers have not been able to keep up."

"We are lost, then," ejaculated Bigamini.

"No—no," exclaimed Toro, "not lost, though would to goodness we had a weapon each."

* * * * *

They looked anxiously about them.

Nearer and nearer came the baying of the dogs.

Nearer and nearer every minute they approached.

Minutes were precious now indeed.

Minutes—aye, seconds.

"It's all over with this poor child," cried Bigamini, in despair.

"Not yet," exclaimed Toro; "there's the river."

"The river?"

"Ay; can you swim?"

"Like a stone."

"No matter. Jump in, I'll help you across."

"Ugh!"

It was a sad alternative, but Bigamini was a bit of a philosopher.

"Better be drowned than made into dog's meat," he groaned.

And in he plunged.

As they struck the water the four bloodhounds ran sniffing up to the bank of the river.

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF DANGER—ON THE MARCH—A TYRANT AND HIS VICTIM—THE BUSHRANGERS—CONGENIAL SPIRITS—CAPTAIN MORGAN.

TORO arose to the surface and looked about him.

Bigamini was splashing and floundering about trying to cry out in fright, but half choked with the water he had swallowed.

"Strike out."

Bigamini heard it and he obeyed.

Yes, he obeyed it too much; for he struck out at such a rate that down he went.

"Fool!" cried Toro.

The bloodhounds stood sniffing about the bank of the river, looking wistfully at their destined prey, but they did not like taking the water.

They wanted their masters there to encourage them.

The hounds had gained upon them, solely because they had got free from the guidance of their masters; yet now they were useless in the absence of their masters.

Toro, who was pretty well versed in the nature of these fierce brutes, saw it all and his courage arose.

With one hand upon Bigamini's head—he held him by the hair—he managed to swim vigorously for the opposite bank of the river.

The wretched Bigamini was in an awful fright.

He struggled and sought to clutch at his companion, and finally securing a hold, he dragged him under too.

Toro was a veteran swimmer and he knew exactly the danger he ran.

What was better, he knew how to avoid it.

He fought Bigamini off promptly and once more secured a hold upon his head.

Then off for shore.

A few more strokes and he scrambled up the bank, dragging Bigamini after him.

Now Bigamini was rather more dead than alive, and it wanted one or two gentle taps from his companion's heavy hand to bring him to himself.

"You idiot!" exclaimed Toro, "you nearly succeeded in drowning me as well as yourself."

Smack!

"Oho!" yelled Bigamini, piteously.

"Take that."

"I've got it," roared Bigamini, rubbing the side of his head.

"Take that, too—you imbecile—and that!"

"That'll do—that'll do!" cried Bigamini; "give it to somebody that wants it; drop it; I'm black and blue."

"You wanted to drown me," exclaimed his tyrant, "after saving your life."

"No—no—oho!"

"That'll teach you to keep cool and keep your head above water."

Bigamini did his best to dodge his tormentor; but he got a cuff between each word.

"You won't give me much chance," he said, weeping, "you ill-use me so."

"Quiet."

"After all I've done for you."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Why, you—"

The rest of his remonstrances were drowned in a succession of blows which Bigamini took without dodging, as he gave up any opposition for a bad job, and when the Italian was tired of smacking and cuffing, he rested, and so did his wretched companion.

There is an end to everything, however, and as Toro grew fatigued, Bigamini lay back and groaned himself off into a gentle doze.

"Get up."

"Don't—oho!"

"Get up, I say!" thundered Toro; "if you go to sleep in your wet clothes, you'll get ague and rheumatism, and all sorts of complaints."

"I don't care," returned Bigamini. "I'd sooner go to sleep; I'm done brown."

Toro's only notice of this touching appeal was a kick—but oh! such a kick!

It lifted Bigamini fairly off the ground.

He gave a yell and started off at a run.

The Italian strode after him, only once turning around to shake his clenched fist at the four bloodhounds that stood regarding their fleeting prey with wistful eyes.

"We've done you," he exclaimed, exultingly, "done you, you beasts."

Bigamini limped along until Toro drew nearer and administered another gentle reminder.

"Oho," yelled the escaped convict; "don't I wish I was back again in quod neither, wuss luck, you brute."

"What?"

"Oh, don't. Why, quod was a Paradise compared with this; they didn't knock your blessed chump up every moment."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," said Toro, with a grim smile.

"So I did—so I did," persisted Bigamini; "the prog was good, though the parson did dose you with his sermings."

"And the crank?"

Bigamini pulled rather a long face.

"Well, the crank did give you 'what for, Lady Jane?' pretty much, but I didn't have much of that."

"Hark you, Bigamini," said his companion, fiercely, "sooner than be back there, I would lay my bones at the bottom of that river."

"Would you? Then all I can say is as I don't approve of your taste."

"Perhaps not, but I'd sooner anything—yes, sooner be worried by those fierce bloodhounds, sooner, far sooner, be torn piecemeal than find myself put to the crank and to their labor, that breaks the heart in a man."

"You needn't have done it unless you pleased."

"And what would have been the alternative? The lash would have been the alternative. I know it to my cost."

And as he spoke, the burly convict shuddered, showing how heavily his punishment had sat upon him.

* * * * *

At noon they rested.

Had they sat down to rest a mile before they did, they would have been lost.

The soldiers in pursuit came up within that distance of the fugitives.

"Are you dry?"

"Dry," echoed Bigamini; "dry ain't the word, old pal. I'm just dying of thirst."

"Bah; I don't mean that."

"I do, though. I'd give all my fortune for one suck at a pewter quart of humble, and I'd bet that there wouldn't be much left in it when I took it away."

"I mean, are your clothes dry?"

"Oh, yes: dry as I am, quite," said Bigamini.

"Now, then, say, do you believe I was right in forcing you to keep up?"

Bigamini pulled up a wofully long face.

"Perhaps, but shall we give it up and rest here for a bit?"

"If you like."

He did like.

Down he dropped upon the ground, and before Toro had settled himself comfortably upon the turf beside him, Bigamini was snoring.

"He's able to sleep anywhere," muttered the Italian to himself, "and that ought, if all I have heard be true, show a clear conscience. 'He who sleeps, dallies,' the French proverb says, but, *maladetta!* I can't sleep on an empty stomach, however hard I try. Hah! what's that?"

His heart leaped to his mouth.

Suddenly, from behind a tree, appeared three armed men.

Fierce, rough-looking fellows, dressed in red flannel tunics, high jack-boots, and fur caps.

Each carried a rifle, and as they came up, they presented their weapons at the two escaped convicts.

"Lost!"

Such was Toro's involuntary cry.

But he overrated the danger for once.

"Who are you?"

"Toro was too amazed to reply for a moment.

The speaker repeated his question sharply.

"Answer; do you hear? Answer, or I'll blow you to smithereens!"

"Travelers who have lost their way."

"Humph! Lost your way by a hundred miles or so, I suppose."

"Yes."

The three men burst out laughing simultaneously at this.

"We know the sort of travelers that you are," said one of them, significantly.

"You've got on the uniform of the regiment."

"Yes," added another with a laugh; "honest, benighted travelers."

Toro gave himself up for lost at the word.

The convict dress put aside all chance of throwing dust in their eyes.

"You can shoot us down if you like," said he, doggedly, "for we don't mean to yield."

"Oh, you don't."

"No."

"Call the captain," said one of the new comers.

Another of them blew a shrill blast upon a small horn which he carried at his belt, and almost before the echoes had died away, it was answered from the depths of the adjacent forest.

"Blow again."

The answering call was sent, and in almost less time than it takes to chronicle the fact, two men came running up, closely followed by a black boy.

One of the men was habited the same as the first three in every particular.

The other's dress was almost identical with the rest, only he wore a hat instead of the fur cap, and by his side he carried a long sword in a metal sheath.

The black boy's dress calls for little description, there was so little of it.

You have all heard of the savage king whose toilet for state ceremonials consisted of a cocked hat and a pair of spurs.

Well, this young savage's dress consisted of rather less.

His whole wardrobe was a cotton pocket-handkerchief tied around his loins.

He was a bright-looking, intelligent young fellow for his race, of a light and lissome build that seemed to indicate he could run like a greyhound and never tire.

"What larkth," cried the boy, grinning from ear to ear and showing a set of ivories that would have excited the envy of a London dentist. "Yah—yah!"

"What have you got here, Marchant?" demanded the man in the hat, sharply, his manner indicating a superiority to his companions.

"A couple of innocent, benighted travelers," answered the man addressed as Marchant, with a gruff laugh.

"Escaped convicts?"

"Yes."

"Humph!"

Toro was on his feet by now, and a sidelong kick brought Bigamini up beside him, blinking and winking like an owl in daylight.

"Get up and lend a hand," he said, quickly.

"They're down upon us, and we are lost, but we will fight for it."

Bigamini said nothing.

"Fight for what?" demanded the man in the hat.

"Before you shall take us back to prison," retorted Toro, fiercely.

"Ha—ha—ha—ha!" laughed the stranger, mockingly. "Catch any of us going near to prison. No—no; we are too wide awake for that."

Bigamini rubbed his eyes like one of those fishermen in the "Arabian Nights."

"Why, don't you see who they are?" he exclaimed.

"No; not I."

"It is plain as a pikestaff," answered Bigamini; "they are Australian bushrangers."

Toro stared again.

"Yes, bushrangers. Look you, friend, we are starving. Give us a bite of food, bread, no matter what, and a drink, and you may claim of us what you will."

"Give them food, captain?" demanded one of the party.

The chief nodded.

"You shall tell me in return what you were condemned for to transportation."

"Willingly," replied Toro. "I was innocent."

"So was I," added Bigamini, quickly, "as a sucking lamb."

The chief of the bushrangers turned to his men, and quietly said:

"If I catch them lying to me, I will nod my head as a signal for you to shoot them both through the heart."

"Now," continued the chief of the bushrangers, "let me know why you are here, and for what crime committed."

"I am not guilty of the crime I was punished for; I am innocent of that."

"So I thought," said the chief; "I never met a guilty man yet."

"Dat's right," said the black boy, with a guffaw, "dese am lily white angels, yah—yah!"

"Hold your croakings, you black devil," thundered Toro, fiercely, "or I'll cut you in two."

The young darkey put his hands to his nose and took a deliberate sight while he wagged his woolly head backwards and forwards in the most aggravating way imaginable.

"Oh, you big baby. Catch Tinker first."

"What?"

"No cathee, no habee. Yah—yah!"

"Keep quiet, Tinker," exclaimed the bushranger chief; "and you are wrong to heed him—although, I must say, your confession of innocence is more than an excuse for a nigger—why, it's enough to make a cat laugh."

"Your doubts are natural, perhaps," said the Italian convict, "but although I have a pretty long string of sins to answer for, lying was never one of them."

The chief laughed.

"Well answered," he said; "but not to waste time, what were you convicted for?"

"Robbery. But I was innocent."

"Of course."

"I was, I swear it. But my old life was raked up. Those police of yours are prying wretches; they turn a man inside out. They learned things of my past life which I had actually forgotten myself in the lapse of years, and when it was discovered that I had been leader of a notorious band of Italian brigands, I was condemned almost unheard upon the charge of highway robbery. I acknowledge to you that I have committed acts a hundred times worse than that for which I was accused, tried and convicted, so I have no reason to protest in my innocence to you if it were not true."

"Very strange luck," said the bushranger, meditatively; "you carry on for years with impunity, and finally get nobbled for a job you have never done."

"Had I got into that little trouble in my own country," said Toro, bitterly, "I should have got off easily."

"How?"

"By what you call 'squaring' the police," was the reply.

"Oh," said the bushranger, "the police in England are a brutal, hard-fisted set of men."

"Hard indeed!" growled Toro; "the two that took me nearly strangled me with their brutal knuckles that dug into my throat—I had to march or choke."

The bystanders laughed heartily at this.

"Yes," said Bigamini, "they can run 'em in. Oh, my!"

"And what did you do?"

"Oh, I married a little too much," returned Bigamini, making a very long face.

"Bigamy?"

"That's what they called it."

"How many wives did you have?"

"Only four."

"And you got punished for that?" exclaimed the bushranger chief; "why, you should have been rewarded by a gold medal. There's not a second man in Great Britain and Ireland that would dare tackle four wives—why, you are a hero."

"Let's give a cheer, captain," said one of the men, "for the man with four wives."

"Hip—hip—hip—hurrah!"

Bigamini stood before them bowing modestly, while they were yelling with laughter.

"We met here by accident," said Toro, "but we had been old comrades in Italy."

"Indeed; was he a brigand, too, there?"

Bigamini looked anxiously about him.

"No—no—no!"

"Yes, he was. He was attached to our band as a spy, but at last he was suspected of playing fast and loose."

"How?"

"Of being in the pay of Jack Harkaway."

The chief of the bushrangers gave a start.

"Who?"

"Harkaway."

"Do you know him?"

Toro laughed bitterly.

"To my cost. He destroyed our band in Italy, rooted us out in Greece. Ah, it was an unlucky day that we fell foul of the Englishman, Jack Harkaway."

"I know all that story," said the chief; "so you are one of those men. What is your name?"

"It was Toro, then."

"Toro!" ejaculated the other; "you are Toro, the giant brigand?"

"Yes."

"And he?"

"Bigamini, the spy."

"Of course—of course. I should have guessed as much. Now, I'll tell you what, Toro, and you too, Bigamini, ours is a free and easy life—we are, as you guessed, bushrangers, and my band has a name which has inspired fear, if not respect, in all the country around. Will you join us?"

"Gladly!" ejaculated Toro, promptly; "most gladly."

"And you?"

"Rayther, my pippin," cheerfully responded Bigamini.

"You know our names, now tell us your name," said the Italian convict.

"Morgan."

"What!" cried Toro and Bigamini in surprise, "Morgan?"

"Yes, Captain Morgan, the bushranger."

CHAPTER IV.

HORSE TAMING A LA RAREY—YOUNG JACK TO THE RESCUE—WHAT A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE DID FOR IT.

THE bloodhounds were got back by Monday and his sable companion from the fruitless chase after the escaped convicts.

Indeed, it was quite by accident that they had joined in the hunt.

When the alarm was given, Sunday happened to be exercising the dogs, for it was a very hot night, and he could not sleep, when one of the men from the jail came running up, and pressed him into the service.

Next morning there was a great stir in the Harkaway household.

It was the day appointed for starting on their journey, providing all the preparations were complete.

The horses were especially troublesome, for several of them were not broken in.

Amongst the latter category, was a colt that had mastered most of their men, and thrown both Sunday and Monday, who were each good horsemen.

Accordingly Harkaway was consulted, and the colt was brought around to receive his opinion upon it.

"A beautiful little thing," he said. "How smart. What action; yet I can see that he is a little spitfire."

And they all stood around looking on, when Mr. Mole came up.

"I must say I think that young men have degenerated since I was a lad," he said.

"Indeed, Mr. Mole," said Dick Harvey, with a sly wink at young Jack.

"Why, sir?" said young Jack.

"Why?" ejaculated Mole. "Do you ask why?"

"Well, I certainly did, sir," answered young Jack, quietly. "At least, so I thought."

"Then I may tell you it is because when I was a young man, I should have thought no more of jumping on that colt's back than of whistling Jack Robinson."

"About the same, I suppose, sir," said Dick Harvey.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you never think of whistling Jack Robinson, and I suppose you would just

about as much have thought of mounting that colt."

"Well, I don't suppose that you are going to try, Harvey," said old Mole, with the most aggravating air in the world. "You have your points, Harvey, but you were never distinguished—you'll excuse my saying so—by any great degree of daring and intrepidity."

"Perhaps not," said Harvey, slightly nettled. "Have you forgotten the Greek brigands?"

"Stop a bit," said young Jack; "let's all have a turn at him, and try if we can't get his mettle under a bit."

"De horse is a farnal tartar, Massa Jack," said Monday.

"Frightened you, Monday!" exclaimed young Jack, grinning.

"No—no," returned Monday, quickly; "de horse as could do dat don't exist on dis here side ob Jordan."

Mole chuckled audibly.

"Brag's a good dog," said Jack, "but Holdfast's a better."

"I'll hab another turn at de animal, if I die," said Monday.

"Bravo, Monday!" exclaimed Harkaway, heartily.

"Bravo!"

Monday caught the colt by the bridle, and held him in a grip of iron, while he edged up to his side.

"Woa—woa!" cried Monday.

The colt remained perfectly still for a time; but no sooner did he feel the Prince of Limbi's knees near his side than up went his heels.

For this he was rewarded with a good smart punch in the ribs by Monday, which served to steady him for awhile.

Profiting by a moment or so of calm, Monday leaped into the saddle.

Now, no sooner did the restive colt feel the weight of his rider, than up went his heels again.

Then he reared up in front.

"Keep quiet!" cried Monday, giving him a spank across the haunches.

The colt sprang forward.

"Oh—oh!" cried Monday; "somebody hold him, or he kill me."

The colt then jumped up all fours in the air, and careering sideways as he touched the ground, over went the darkey, flat upon his back.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed Sunday; "lubby hoss riding; old Monday berry clever."

"Went down all of a lump, eh, Monday?" said Dick.

"Monday, my boy, you ought to limit your daring to riding our goat," said Mr. Mole.

"Now, then, Sunday," cried Harkaway, "you have your chance."

Sunday perceived them grinning all around, and he would fain have been excused.

But there was no getting out of it.

"Up with you," said Harkaway, laughing.

"I se gwine, sar; dis child not afraid," returned Sunday, who was especially anxious that his shirking should not be observed.

"The beast is not vicious," said Harvey. "I'm sure of that."

"Try him, Dick," said Mole.

"If Sunday is dropped, I will," answered Harvey.

"Hab my turn; I don't want it, Massa Harvey!" said Sunday, jumping back with alacrity.

"No, thanks; up you go, Sunday."

"My opinion," Mr. Mole observed, with some dignity, "is that the girth is much too tight; you're cutting the horse in two, and yet you are surprised to find him restive."

Sunday glanced at it and nodded at Mole.

"Tank'ee, brudder-in-la," he said, with that peculiar grin which made the old gentleman writhe; "I se almost sartin you've got it right for once, old boy."

He loosened the girth and then he caught at the horse's mane.

Round and round went the vicious beast, and do all he would he could not get his foot in the stirrup.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed Mr. Mole. "Very good, a very good horseman—quite a Ducrow."

"Quite a Jim Crow," said Jefferson, grinning.

"That's nearer the mark."

This excited such a grin that Sunday lost his temper.

"Look hyar, brudder-in-la," said he, "don't you go to be so farnal dam imperent."

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the whole of the bystanders.

Goaded to deeds of daring by this, Sunday, who was remarkably active, rushed at the colt, and catching wildly at the mane, he made a prodigious leap.

Hey, presto!

He was in the saddle.

But, alas! for the poor darkey, the colt had been too quick for him, and pirouetted just at the self-same moment that Sunday had made his leap, and the consequence was, although he was up, he found himself the wrong side to London.

In other words he was facing the tail, which he grabbed at on the first impulsive instinct, and now held as a bridle.

It was a sight to remember then.

The darkey's look of amazement as he held the tail was comical in the extreme.

"What's dat, not him head?" he ejaculated, staring about stupidly.

He looked at Mole, and at Harvey, and then at young Jack, as if suspecting that they were responsible for this mishap.

"Bravo, Sunday!" cried Mr. Mole, vociferously.

"Bravo!"

"That's the best way to get up."

"You'll stay on quite as long that way," said Mr. Mole; "but mind you don't swallow his tail."

"Go an' swally yar wooden props, brudder-in-la!" said Sunday with ineffable contempt.

"Insolent nigger!" retorted Mr. Mole.

"Yah!"

The wild yell of the infuriated nigger set the colt on the pirouette again.

Round and round.

Still Sunday clutched the colt's tail like grim death.

Up and down.

Then that ugly side jump, like a frisky kitten does when it pretends to be startled.

Sunday wrenched again at the tail as though it was a stout rein with a powerful bit at the end of it, when the colt, not approving of this kind of treatment, kicked out.

Up went his heels.

"Bravo, Sunday!" cried the boys, excitedly, "keep it up."

But just as they had uttered these words of encouragement, the colt sprang up suddenly, sideways, and Sunday was jolted from his hold upon the tail.

He turned and clutched at the saddle.

It shifted.

"Golly!" cried Sunday, in alarm, "de blessed saddle is gwine to vyage."

"The belly-band's loose," said Jefferson.

But no one could get near enough to the animal to tighten it, and slowly but surely down went the saddle, with Sunday clinging frantically to it, until he slid fairly under the horse's belly.

They did not laugh now.

This situation was even more perilous than droll.

However, the colt rested for a moment, and then Jefferson clutched him by the head and held him in a grasp which master colt took as a wholesome warning to remain still.

As soon as Sunday was rescued from his dangerous position, he began to abuse his brother-in-law, Isaac Mole.

"Dat's your fault, brudder-in-la," he said, indignantly.

"Mine?" quoth the old gentleman, in amazement.

"Yes, yourn."

"How so?"

"Didn't you tell me to loosen the girths?"

"Bah!" yelled Mr. Mole, contemptuously; "you must have a rocking horse to tame, my good Sunday—that is more in your line."

A general laugh greet Mr. Mole's taunt.

"I should like to see Mr. Mole have a try," laughed Dick.

"Oh!" cried the worthy Isaac, "that's the way you want to shirk out of your job, after making such a parade of volunteering to mount it."

They grinned at this, but Dick tightened the colt's girth and vaulted into the saddle with the ease of an experienced riding-master.

Dick held the colt tight in hand, but the vicious animal made a sudden rush off, and then suddenly pulling up short, sent the rider flying over his head.

Dick was much shaken, but got up and joined good-humoredly in the grin at his own expense.

Jefferson now had a turn, and by sheer strength he created a sort of respect for himself in the colt's mind, but in a moment he caught his rider unawares, and laid Jefferson as neatly as possible upon the flat of his back.

"Now, then, Harkaway," he cried, jumping up.

"My turn," said old Jack, nothing loth, and coming forward with a laugh; "make way, there. Let me get a fair hold of the wild creature."

At this juncture young Jack came forward,

and begged his father to allow him to take his place.

"You'll get hurt, perhaps killed, Jack."

"I don't mind that, dad," returned the boy, promptly.

"I know that, sir," answered his father, "but I do."

"I don't fear danger, dad."

And as if to put an end to the discussion, impudent young Jack caught hold of the colt and jumped into the saddle.

The frisky animal had not had such a light weight outside before, so he played some pranks of quite a novel and unexpected character.

He bounded forward and stopped short.

Then danced aside.

Then took a run and jumped an imaginary brook, but young Jack held on.

He was more difficult to dislodge than any of his predecessors.

The colt grew frantic.

Up it went on its hind legs, until young Jack was in a perfectly perpendicular position.

"So, sir," said the young rider, "you won't give over—you'll not keep still."

The colt's reply was to bound in the air all four legs together.

Then off he tore.

A mad, wild gallop just as Mazeppa was torn through the desert, with this very important difference.

"Jack—Jack!" cried his father, "for Heaven's sake take care!"

Young Jack stuck well to the wild colt.

After careering around and around for awhile like this—for he was forced to obey the rein a little—he came to a sudden stoppage, and stood for a moment, prior to springing off again, but young Jack did not leave him time.

He had a bottle of champagne in his pocket which he had put there for the colt as an experiment.

And waiting his chance, then seizing the bottle by its neck, he gave the colt a sharp and heavy blow with the body of the bottle across his forehead.

Bang went the bottle, between its ears, and the wine streamed down its face and running into his eyes, the colt stood still upon the instant, trembling from head to foot with fear—tamed as if by magic.

"Now," said his rider, and his master, young Jack, "just go around to please me."

He touched the colt lightly with the spur, and he started off with an easy canter.

Back he came, and stood stock still in the exact spot where young Jack wished him to.

"He won't try those larks on again," said the boy.

"Bravo, Jack!" shouted Jefferson.

They all caught up the cry, Mole included, shouting:

"Bravo, Champagne Jack!"

And young Jack was decidedly the colt tamer and hero of the hour.

CHAPTER V.

ROOK THE CONVICT—THE HARKAWAY PARTY ON THE MARCH—AN INCIDENT OF TRAVEL—THE ALARM AT THE CAMP—MIKE'S WARNING.

THE expedition started for their new settlement.

"It looks like a grand caravan," said young Jack.

And in point of fact, it was rather an important procession altogether.

Leading them were the two darkeys, who formed a sort of advanced guard.

Sunday and Monday were mounted upon a pair of stout mules.

Behind them were two mounted servants, who had been engaged in Sydney.

Then followed a large wagon-load of necessities of every description.

Next came two more servants from the colony, and following upon the tamed horse was young Jack, with his friend Harry Girdwood beside him, well mounted upon a coal-black horse.

Following these were two tumbrils of goods and chattels.

Then there were three horsemen riding abreast.

Jack Harkaway the elder, between Jefferson and Dick Harvey.

Next to young Jack's, this was the part of the procession which commanded the greatest attention.

After this came an open carriage or drag, in which were seated Mrs. Harkaway, Mrs. Harvey, little Emily, Ada, Parquita, Mr. Mole, and his dark spouse.

Following them were three wagon-loads of

goods, then a cargo of female domestics and a guard of male servants, mounted and armed, brought up the rear.

They followed the course of the river, and having by twelve o'clock come to a leafy glade by the riverside, they decided upon resting to lunch and rest during the fiercer heat of the day.

"Get out the fishing-rods and tackle, boys," cried old Jack, "and let us have some fresh fish to offer the ladies."

The boys went to work immediately.

"There's trout here, Jack," Harry Girdwood said.

"We'll precious soon have some, then," answered young Jack.

A little patience, helped out by some skill in angling, enabled them to land a few fine fish, but no trout, in the course of a few minutes.

"They're not shy here, ma," said young Jack, to his mother.

"They're like my boy in that respect," said Mrs. Harkaway.

"Very good—very good," exclaimed Mr. Mole, "he's not at all shy, my dear."

* * * * *

Next day, about sundown, the party had made a considerable advance, and they were just thinking of camping for the night, when an incident occurred which it is as well to notice.

"This looks a favorable place for the ladies' tent," said Jefferson, surveying an open spot closely surrounded by trees.

Harkaway rode up with the two colored gentlemen.

"Yes, this will do. Up with the tent, Rook—Rook! Why, where the deuce is Rook?"

The word went forward.

"Rook!" cried several of the party, in a chorus.

"Where is he?"

There was a general hunt at this, for Rook was quite an expert at tent pitching, and as their present tent was of considerable dimensions, it wanted someone who understood his work to take the management of it.

Rook was one of the helps or men servants who had been engaged by Harkaway from the convict settlement.

He had been strongly recommended by the chaplain and by the governor, who both attested to Rook's good behavior.

* * * * *

"Where is Rook? Why, there he is," cried Harry Girdwood, standing up in his stirrups.

"Where?"

"In the water."

They turned around at this, and then they perceived Rook a long way down the stream swimming around a white object which was bobbing about in the water.

What could it be?

"He is imprudent to go bathing while he is so hot," said Jefferson. "I heard him complaining of the heat not an hour ago."

"So did I."

A shout was raised for him, but the distance being too great for the voice to reach, a call was blown by young Jack upon his bugle—a signal understood to recall stragglers from the party, which was a very useful thing in such a party as this was—and its shrill echo soon caught his attention.

The swimmer threw up one arm and waved it in acknowledgment of the signal, then he struck out for shore.

To throw on his guernsey, flannel garibaldi, and get into his boots was the work but of a few moments.

Then off he ran and came up at a quick double.

Rook was a smartly built fellow, with a keen, cunning face.

He had an eye which took in everything at a single glance.

He went straight up to old Jack, and gave him a semi-military salute.

"I hope I am not offending, Mr. Harkaway?" he said.

"No—no, Rook."

"Quite innocently if I did offend, sir," returned Rook; "the day has been very hot, and as you were nearly halting for the night, I thought I would take a dip before it got too dark; the sun goes down suddenly here."

"There's no harm done, Rook," returned old Jack, smiling, "we were concerned for you."

"You are very good to me, sir," said the man, hanging his head.

Harkaway looked anxiously around.

"Keep your own counsel, Rook, about the past."

"Yes, sir."

"Let us keep it to ourselves," said old Jack, earnestly, "and who knows but that a new and happy future lies before us, with forgetfulness, utter oblivion of all that is bad in our past?"

Rook stood abashed and silent before his patron.

Why had he nothing to say for himself now? We shall see.

"Come, Rook," said Jefferson, stepping forward, "up with the tent."

"We are going to pitch here, sir?"

"Yes."

"Very good."

Rook, aroused from a momentary reverie which the incident with Harkaway had occasioned, set to work in a regular business-like way to raise the ladies' pavilion.

"The center pole here, Mr. Monday, please; now, Burgess, and you too, Watts, pull altogether with me, and it will be all up in three movements."

Then the edges of the canvas were pegged down securely, and after this there remained nothing to do but to bring in the furniture.

* * * * *

Rook, the ticket-of-leave man, stood by the riverside looking moodily into the water.

He was in trouble.

Sore trouble.

He was quarrelling with himself, and it's an old and true saying that that is the worst person in the world to be at loggerheads with.

"There can be no mistake about me. I am bad, thoroughly bad at heart," he mused, "or I should never have listened to Morgan's man and his temptations. I must be mad, too, for, all question of gratitude apart, my interest is here. This Harkaway is rich and powerful and generous. He is the first man who ever held out the hand of friendship to me, and he does it, too, when the world discards me forever. Why did I listen to that spy—that serpent's tongue in Sydney?"

That question was very easily answered.

Contact with good and innocent people had gradually worked a change in his nature, which was, perhaps, not altogether bad.

But temptations had been thrown in his way.

Glittering promises, rich rewards, and a life of freedom, had all dazzled a man who was barely free from the prison cell.

And next moment his patron and would-be benefactor had given him words of comfort and of sympathy, which wrung his heart.

"Fool—fool, and villain that I have been," he murmured, wringing his hands in anguish. "What punishment do I not deserve?"

"Rook."

A light hand was placed upon his shoulder.

He turned shortly around and gave a guilty start.

Harkaway stood at Rook's elbow, looking at him with considerable earnestness.

"What was that white thing floating in the water?" asked Harkaway.

The convict's glance fell.

"Where, sir?"

"Where you were bathing."

"Only a piece of paper which had blown there; I saw it and thought it was some water-lily or other plant. And as I heard the young lady—Miss Emily—say she would like one, I swam out to get it, but I was disappointed, that is why I did not speak of it."

"What kind of paper was it?" said Harkaway.

"A paper bag, or something of that kind. It had been thrown away, probably, by some one of our party, sir, and blown there."

At this moment young Jack's voice was heard calling his father.

Harkaway ran off, followed by Rook.

He reached the Harkaways just in time to hear them talking of something which made him turn hot and cold all in a second.

"Mike was so restless and uneasy," said young Jack, "that Harry and I took him to find out what it could mean. We made our way towards that clump of trees yonder."

"What did you discover?" asked Harkaway.

"Nothing. We returned for the hounds, and some more assistance."

"Very prudent, Jack."

"Why, you see, dad, if it is only some large game, we should get Mike into trouble, perhaps, and if anything worse, it is as well for us to be prepared."

"Very good, indeed, Jack. Jefferson."

"What now?"

"Get two of the hounds, and come with us to the wood yonder. Bring your gun."

Jefferson perceived by Harkaway's manner that it was urgent, and so he was soon ready with his gun and the bloodhounds.

"Stay by the ladies' tent, Rook," said Harkaway. "It is a post of honor, my good fellow."

"Yes, sir."

Harkaway and the party, comprising Jefferson and the two boys, hurried off, leaving Rook on guard at the tent.

"I'll keep my post," said the convict, looking after them; "but if any harm should come of this to that noble-hearted fellow, Harkaway, I'll put a pistol in my mouth, and blow my worthless brains out."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST PERILS OF THE NEW EXPEDITION—A TRAITOR IN CAMP—THE WATCH—A BLACK BOBBY UNKNOWN IN SCOTLAND YARD—THE SPY'S MISSIVE—A WARNING—TORO IN TROUBLE—FORDING A RIVER—WHERE'S BOBBY?

WITHIN a hundred yards of the spot where Rook had jumped into the water to bathe was a clump of trees, where there were three men lying concealed.

Three men?

Well, two were certainly men, and big, sturdy fellows, too; but the third would be more properly described as a boy.

The two men had the dress and general bearing of bushrangers, and were armed with hatchets and with rifles.

The boy was a bright-eyed lad, black as a sloe and glossy as though his skin had been polished up with oil and bees' wax, such as we use to renovate our mahogany sideboards.

Around his loins he wore a colored handkerchief, which was his entire wardrobe.

He was armed, too.

But his only weapon was a short ax or tomahawk, which was stuck into the colored handkerchief-garment in position.

Now one of these men carried a field-glass in a sling by his side, and with it he was busied the whole time in taking observations of the movements of the caravanserai.

"Can you see him?" demanded one of the men, a huge fellow, whose foreign accent should reveal his identity to the reader at once.

"Who?"

"Harkaway. Is he alone?"

"No."

"Wait till he is then, and—"

"And what?"

"Pop him off."

"What do you mean?" demanded his companion, in some astonishment. "Shoot him?"

"Yes."

"Why, what on earth for? I'm not given to shooting men for mischief's sake."

"But I hate this Harkaway like poison."

"Well, I know precious little of him," said the other, coolly, "but that little has rather impressed me in his favor."

The other stared.

"You mean that you like him?"

"Yes, for his courage."

The other's black eyes flashed fiercely.

"You like this man, do you? Well, then, all I have to say is, that any man who likes Harkaway, can't like me."

The bushranger listened quietly.

"I don't know that I ever professed to have any affection for you, Mr. T.," he said, with a mocking laugh. "I deceived you if I did, that's all."

His burly companion swelled out and swore again.

"Morgan, beware of me; if you offend me, I have your—"

What more he was about to say must be left to the imagination, for ere he could complete his boastful menace, his companion clapped the muzzle of his gun to his chest, while his finger trembled upon the trigger.

"Silence, you bragging, bullying beast!" he said, in low, earnest tones between his set teeth, "and learn, my maccaroni, that men who threaten John Morgan are as a rule short-lived."

A pause.

It was a precious awkward situation.

The bully's color came and went.

He quailed.

Had he dared to utter another word of menace, his life would have paid forfeit for his temerity.

This he knew.

"You haven't anything to say for yourself, Toro," said his companion, lowering his gun. "I thought you would come to your senses. It is no fault of mine, if you haven't come to them before. But I object to scenes of this kind; let it serve you once for all as a lesson that our positions are not alike. I command—you obey."

Toro was cowed.

The black boy stared at the two in silent curiosity.

But by degrees it dawned upon him that they were quarreling, and then he drew his tomahawk and gave it a flourish.

"Um fellas am bery much considerable dam beast, sar," said he to Morgan. "Bobby slice um liver, sar!"

And he made a movement towards Toro, only waiting for his master's word to set to work in real right-down earnest.

"No—no, Bobby; not now—"

"Do it quick, sar, tremenjously bery much, sar."

And he flourished his ax with great eagerness.

"No—no, Bobby; be quiet."

His queer English, with the extravagant adjectives, puzzled Toro, but he dimly guessed that the boy meant mischief to him, and so thought it a safe opportunity of venting some of the rage and spite which were boiling over within him.

"Saucy imp!" he said.

And he dealt Master Tinker Bobby one back-hander which sent him rolling over and over upon the ground.

The black boy scrambled up, looking quite dazed.

"Halloo!" exclaimed Captain Morgan, "that is what I can't allow. Quiet, Tinker—put by your ax, do you hear? If we see anything more of that sort, Mr. Toro, we shall have to be unpleasant generally."

Toro scowled.

"You needn't fear for the boy, captain," he said, with a sneer.

"I don't fear for him," returned Morgan; "but for you."

"Me!"

"Yes; and I can't afford to have a good man like you maimed through any silly broil that may arise."

A sullen silence ensued.

* * * * *

"Look out!"

"Where?"

"There! see, there's one of their men who is going to bathe. Look, he throws his jacket off."

Morgan clapped his glass up to his eye.

"Why, it is our man, Rook."

He followed the ex-convict's movements with his glass until the bugle from the Harkaway camp sounded his recall.

Then he struck in for shore, and left something white floating about.

"That's what he has been there for," said Morgan, in a tone indicative of subdued excitement.

"We must have that."

"Tinker Bobby go fetch it, sar?" said the black boy; "bring it tremenjous exceedin' bery quick, sar."

"Not yet. Wait."

They waited until the momentary excitement in the Harkaway camp was stilled, and then upon the word of command from Captain Morgan, the black boy dived into the water.

He was under for an amazing time, and when he shot up to the surface, it was close to the floating white object which had excited so much attention upon all sides.

"I've got it awful bery tight, sar," cried Bobby, spluttering.

"Come back, then."

"Yes, sar."

He gave one vigorous stroke, and shot towards the shore.

The paper was written on and folded triple, so as to preserve the writing from the action of the water.

"Here's glorious news!" Morgan exclaimed, in subdued excitement.

"Let us share it," said Toro.

"Read."

He handed the paper to Toro, who hastily scanned it through.

"This is good, indeed, Captain Morgan," he exclaimed.

What was this?

Simply the following words written upon what Rook, the ex-convict, had professed to be a piece of waste paper.

The bulk of the valuables may be found in the van of the procession. They are contained in the last tumbril but one. Be wary, for they are all fully armed, and every man here is a formidable enemy to cope with."

"None can speak better on that point than you, Toro, I believe," said Captain Morgan.

"To my cost I know it."

"Forward, then!" said Morgan.

They hurried along, skirting the wood lining their bank of the river, until they got about a hundred yards or so ahead of the encampment.

"Now," said Captain Morgan, "we shall have

to ford it."

"Yes."

"Bobby!"

"Sar?"

"Try the river."

"Yes."

The black boy dropped down into the river in the twinkling of an eye, and instead of being able to ford it, he discovered himself in a hole a good twelve feet deep.

But he was so thoroughly used to the water that he shot up to the surface again in a crack.

"Bery considerable dam deep here, sar," he said, spluttering and spitting the water out of his mouth.

"Hush!"

"Right, sar."

"Now drop again."

Down went Bobby, and this time he found that he could walk.

"Hyar we is, in full marching order, Cap'en Morgan," said Bobby, marching along with extravagant military strides.

"Quiet, Bobby," whispered Morgan, in a voice of alarm; "you'll put them onto us with their dogs, and if you do, you'll have all your work to do to get safe off."

"Tinker Bobby eat the dogs widout no salt," said the black boy.

"Don't you learn to brag, Bobby," said Captain Morgan; "leave that to your civilized Italian friends; they can brag enough for all of us. Let us be quick."

Now the prudence of this prompt movement was soon shown, for barely had they got thirty yards along the opposite bank, when they perceived a number of horsemen advancing cautiously in single file, with one of their number as outrider far in advance of the rest.

A blackbird's call was heard, and the party halted.

"Tooey Whoo!"

"Halt!"

"Morgan!"

"So stand and give the countersign," called a deep bass voice.

"Morgan it is," returned the chief of the bushrangers. "Advance, Forster."

"Here, sir."

"Any news?"

"None, captain."

"The party is here close by," said Morgan. "I hurried on to put you up to their movements. Be careful, Forster, for they keep the most lively watch, and—hark!"

"What's that?"

The alarm was heard in the camp of the Harkaways.

A shrill note, blown upon a whistle, followed by the deep baying of dogs, and a general bustle.

Morgan began to look concerned at this.

"Quick!" he exclaimed; "into your saddles every man Jack of you. I would not risk an encounter for worlds. Not only are they stronger than we are, but it would assuredly risk our chance of a much bigger prize than any we now hold."

"I vote that we turn and fight them!" exclaimed Toro.

The bushranger veered around, and faced the speaker.

"Who gave you permission to vote?" he demanded, fiercely. "Into your saddle, man, or I'll blow your brains out."

That handy rifle of the bushranger covered the Italian once more.

Toro had found more than his match on this occasion.

Morgan was equally fierce, and a clever tactician to boot.

Toro rode quietly off.

"Where is Tinker Bobby?" suddenly whispered Morgan.

Where, indeed?

No one knew.

Bobby was nowhere visible.

CHAPTER VII.

A DROLL HUNT—FROM GAY TO GRAVE—THE ALLIGATOR AND THE BLACK BOY—SAVED BY A HAIR.

The alarm in the Harkaway camp grew general.

"I think there is really something up yonder," said Jefferson, coming up to the spot where Harvey and old Jack stood conversing in whispers.

"What makes you suppose so, Jefferson?"

"The animals are so precious uneasy."

"The dogs?"

"Yes," said Jefferson, seriously; "and Nero, too."

"Nero?"

"Yes."

"Does Nero know when there is danger near?"

"You seem to laugh, Harkaway," said Jefferson, "but the fact is, I have frequently observed that Nero was an uncommon good danger barometer."

Jack laughed.

"A capital simile, Jefferson," he said, "but we must get on after my rash boy, or he'll be getting into mischief."

In Morgan and his bushrangers the Harkaways had a far more dangerous enemy to cope with than any they had known before, in Italy or elsewhere.

These were men of shrewdness—of rare cunning and daring to boot.

Young Jack brought along the two bloodhounds coupled, and after sniffing about for nearly a quarter of a mile, they suddenly bobbed down to the ground, and with a grunt of satisfaction, trotted along at a sweeping jog trot pace.

"Look, Jack," ejaculated Harry Girdwood, "they have struck the trail."

"Rather."

They followed the hounds at a trot for a considerable distance.

Suddenly the bloodhounds drew up short upon the river bank.

They sniffed about, and ran backwards and forwards, whining piteously.

"At fault?"

"Yes," said Harry Girdwood, "the trace is gone here."

The words were barely uttered when the speaker gave his companion a sudden nudge with his elbow.

"Well, old boy, what is it?"

"In the river. Look!"

They saw a human being breasting the surface, and striking out for the opposite bank.

Young Jack brought his rifle up to his shoulder, and took a careful aim.

"Stop, Jack; don't fire; perhaps it is no enemy."

"What does he do here, lurking about?"

"Stop."

"Send the dogs after him," suggested young Harkaway.

This was done at once.

The hounds were uncoupled.

"See, boy; there they go. Look, boy!" he exclaimed.

He pointed out the swimmer, and the dogs, with a snappy sort of bark, leaped into the water.

They made for him as fast as they were able.

But the swimmer shot through the water.

But something appeared to alarm him, and he stopped short suddenly.

He turned around, and swam a little way along the river.

"We shall lose him yet," said Harry Girdwood.

"Not if I know it," said young Jack, seriously.

He looked to the knife in his belt, and, heedless of all consequences, leaped into the river.

"Jack—Jack, old boy," cried Harry, "come back!"

"No—no!" shouted Jack, "I will see what this means."

"Then I will follow you," cried Harry, and he dropped his rifle, and took a long spring.

He dived rather deeper than he meant to.

When he reached the surface, he saw young Jack striking out with long and vigorous strokes towards the swimmer.

At every stroke they were overhauling him fast.

As young Jack neared the object of their pursuit, the moon, temporarily obscured by a cloud, shone forth, and then both he and Harry Girdwood saw that it was a black boy.

It was Tinker Bobby.

Now poor Tinker was in a sore predicament.

He was pursued by two enemies, *plus* two fierce dogs, who were more dangerous enemies than the boys who led the chase.

Tinker looked around.

The magnitude of his danger lent him wings, and he made a vigorous stroke for the shore.

But young Harkaway was already there.

Up Tinker scrambled.

But before he could fairly gain his feet, young Jack pounced upon him, toppled him over, and knelt upon his chest.

Tinker was so blown with fright, and by his exertions to escape, that he could no longer struggle.

He panted and puffed.

And at length he managed to articulate with difficulty these characteristic words:

"Tinker's considerable bery much dam tired."

Young Jack would have laughed under ordinary circumstances.

But he was too preoccupied now.

Where was Harry?

Before he could look around, the black boy muttered a word or two, which thrilled young Jack strongly.

"Where's de shark?"

Shark!

"Whoever heard of a shark up a river like this?"

Before he could make any further inquiry into the subject, a fearful yelp from one of the dogs caught his ear.

And then he saw in a faint, confused manner, something which he never forgot to his dying day.

The first of the dogs which had leaped into the water was seized in the terrific jaws of a hideous-looking monster.

This was Tinker's shark.

It was a kind of cayman, or alligator.

And this was what had so frightened the unfortunate black boy.

But for the encounter with this ugly wretch, Tinker would have got clean off beyond all manner of doubt.

Young Jack got an awful startler then.

He never thought of the prisoner, but with cold drops of perspiration trickling down his back, he looked about for his brave comrade, Harry Girdwood.

Hal! there he was climbing up the river's bank.

The unfortunate hound quivered awhile in the monster's jaws.

Then it was all over.

The alligator took him down as comfortably as though he had been a pill.

The second dog scrambled up the bank, and shook the water from his coat, blissfully ignorant of the fatal accident that had befallen his companion.

"Harry."

"Jack."

"All right—all right, old chum."

They whistled to the hound which had luckily escaped, and when it came up, they put it upon guard over Tinker, while they looked about them.

"That's an awkward job, Jack," said Harry Girdwood.

"What a narrow escape."

"Ugh!"

They saw now lights dancing about upon the opposite bank of the river, and rightly judging that it was some of the party signalling them, they gave a yell together across the water.

It was too dark, and the distance was too great for them to see distinctly.

But they recognized voices, and this was sufficient to make them easy in their minds.

Just then came a well-known voice across the water.

"Jack, my boy."

"Dad."

"Are you safe?"

"Safe and sound, dad," replied young Harkaway to his father.

"Where's Harry?"

"Here."

"Right?"

"Quite right, dad," shouted our young hero.

"All safe, and we've bagged some black game."

"Hurrah!" cried the boys.

"Hurrah!" shouted several voices over the water.

CHAPTER VIII.

GAME—A CRUEL JOKE—TINKER AND MOLE—A BAD OMEN FOR POOR ISAAC.

MOLE was one of the party.

"Game?" said the worthy old epicure, smacking his lips; "I hope it's a turtle."

"Why don't you come back?" shouted Jefferson to the boys.

"They're making the game safe and snug, perhaps," said Harvey.

Mr. Mole took alarm.

"Don't frighten them. Let them take their time. Don't bruise the turtle, Jack," he added, raising his voice, "or you'll spoil the soup."

"Turtle be blowed," said Harvey, contemptuously.

The boys were still lingering on the river's bank.

The alligator's maw did not appear altogether satisfied with the morsel he had just swallowed.

There he was playing about in their quarter, looking longingly up the bank at them like another Oliver Twist mutely asking for more.

The second dog was apparently frightened out

of its wits by the presence of the hideous reptile, and it paddled about whining in distress until Jefferson perceived it, and whistled it up the river's bank.

The noise of the hound attracted the monster's attention, and he left the bank where the boys stood and shot through the water after it.

"Now's our time," cried Harry Girdwood; "over we must get, so over we go."

But this was not only attended with difficulty to themselves, for the prisoner would not move in spite of all their persuasions.

"Over with you," said young Jack, with an admonitory kick.

"Not dis infant," responded Tinker. "No like de shark 'nuff."

"Get on."

"Choke you, if you don't!" threatened Harry Girdwood.

"Bery good, sar," responded Tinker. "Choke away, sar. Choking bery much gooder dan de offal, confounded, immense, big shark."

"We are going, too," said young Jack. "And we're going to kill master alligator."

"Tinker's dere den, sar," ejaculated Tinker, springing forward. "Like exceedingly bery much, sar, to have a slice of de navigator."

"Navigator," quoth young Jack; "alligator, I said."

"I means nabigator," said the black boy, blissfully ignorant of the reason of this.

In he plunged.

Harry Girdwood and young Jack dived after him.

They breasted the water simultaneously, and having with their dive, shot half way over the river, they were precious soon scrambling up the bank opposite.

The monster, whatever it might be, for it certainly was not an alligator, turned from the dog which it had been watching so earnestly, and darted through the water after them.

Just too late.

The beast had been pretty sure of the bloodhound, and a savory morsel it would have made for him.

But he preferred the look of the boys, and so he lost all at once.

But he scrambled up the slippery bank after them, lashing the water with his tail as he quitted the stream.

"Dad—dad," cried young Jack.

The Harkaway party were all there.

They had their rifles ready, and fired.

But the bullets glanced over its horny hide without doing any damage.

Jefferson's experience was useful now.

He had tackled this kind of game before, and he knew well its only vulnerable spot.

A bullet in the eye decided the business.

The beast snorted and writhed a bit, while its huge tail lashed the ground, and then it dropped aside, dead.

"A good-sized turtle, Mr. Mole," suggested Dick, sily. "Capital soup it will make."

"Why, what can it be?" exclaimed the old gentleman, returning.

"What do you think it looks like?" asked Jefferson.

"I can't say," said Mr. Mole.

"Do you think it looks like an alligator?" Mr. Mole rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Yes, but it can't be one. There are none in these parts."

"How do you know?"

"I never read of any animals of this breed or family being seen in Southern Australia."

"Which only proves, perhaps, that the country has not yet been explored far enough. No doubt they would keep far inland."

"Don't talk rubbish."

"Very good," returned Jefferson, gently. "I won't. Since you don't believe, just come a little nearer and see for yourself."

Saying which, he slipped his arm through Mole's, and lifted him along for some distance towards the vanquished reptile.

Mr. Mole looked very much alarmed.

There was never, perhaps, such a lad to enjoy fun as the newly-made prisoner, the black boy, Tinker.

He quite forgot that he was in trouble when there was a chance of fun.

He believed their prey was dead, so he bounded forward and leaped suddenly upon its back with a wild cry.

"Wa-hoo!" yelled Tinker, as he leaped upon the beast.

Up went the dead reptile's tail with a jerk that almost made it flick poor Mole's nose off. The valiant Isaac jumped back as though he had been shot.

"Oh, mercy!" he yelled, and off he flew.

"Wa-hoo! funny oldman," cried Tinker, and

the young miscreant laughed until he rolled up on the ground, holding his sides.

"Get up," said young Jack, who was enjoying it all wonderfully.

"Yes, massa," said Tinker, bounding up like an India-rubber ball.

"What are you laughing at that gentleman for?"

"Yah—yah!"

"Do you hear me, sir?" exclaimed young Jack, with assumed severity.

"Yes, sar," answered Tinker, vainly endeavoring to suppress his mirth before his new master.

"Ole man jumping on two bits o' wood, am so exceednest dam ridiculous, yah—yah—yah!"

"Ha—ha—ha!"

Tinker's laugh was infectious, and it went all around.

"Well," said Jefferson, "poor old Mole had enough to do to hold his own up till the present, but he'll have all his work cut out now, it strikes me."

"Rather."

"Why, this young sweep," said Harkaway, joining the group, "appears rather worse than any one of you. It is certainly a fresh torment for Mole."

"Poor Mole!"

CHAPTER IX.

STARTLING NEWS—FOREWARNED, FOREARMED—ON THE WATCH—SENTINELS, QUADRUPED AND BIPED—THE END OF THE TRAVEL—THE NEW SETTLEMENT—ITS CHRISTENING.

"WHAT'S your name?"

"Tinker."

"Who gave you that name?"

"Captain Morgan."

"What!" cried young Jack and Harry. "Morgan the bushranger?"

"Yes, sar, captain bold man."

Young Jack and Harry Girdwood were the questioners.

"Morgan had to serve him for godfather and godmother as well," said the latter, with a grin.

"Yes, but Tinker isn't a bad name," said young Jack.

"Tinker am a lubly name," said the owner of it, modestly.

"Quite so," said young Jack; "and how long have you been with Captain Morgan, Tinker?"

The boy thought awhile.

"Eber so long, sar; immense, bery long, sar."

"A year—two years?"

"No, sar. One, four, five moons, sar. All dat time wid Cap'en Morgan, sar, Cap'en Morgan and Massa Forster, sar."

"Forster?"

"Yes, sar."

"Who's he?"

"Massa Forster am friend ob Cap'en Morgan, sar."

The boys began to open their eyes and ears both.

"Perhaps dad had better know about this, Harry," said young Jack; "it is important."

"Keep him talking while I fetch them," said Harry.

"Do you like Forster, Tinker?" demanded young Jack.

The boy shook his head.

"No, um kick Tinker. Massa Forster am a considerable beast, sar."

Young Jack was on the grin at this, when Harkaway and Harvey came up.

"What does this Mr. Forster do?" asked young Harkaway, giving his father a side glance of significance.

"He tell de others what to do, when de Cap'en Morgan am out ob de way."

"Oh, I see," said Harry Girdwood, "he's what they call the lieutenant, I suppose?"

"De what?"

"Lieutenant."

Tinker's eyes glistened with intelligence.

"Yes, sah, dat's it. How you know dat? Tinker neber tell yer."

"I knew very well," said Harry, smiling.

"So Mr. Forster is the lieutenant?"

"Yes, sar, left-tenant, dat's it, an' Cap'en Morgan am de right tenant, yah—yah!"

Tinker's very small joke caused a laugh all around.

"And what did you do while you were with them?" demanded Harkaway.

Tinker stood a moment and grew serious.

As he was silent, they pressed the question.

"Me no tell you."

"Why not?"

"You get considerable d—mad with this poor Tinker. You kill him."

"No, we shall not, Tinker," said Harkaway,

kindly; "we shall not treat you a bit the worse."

Tinker looked at the speaker earnestly.

"Sartin?"

"Sartin," responded old Jack, grinning.

The black boy was apparently reassured by Harkaway's manner.

"Tinker had to look after you, all your carts and 'osses an' sich."

The listeners exchanged sharp glances of intelligence together.

This told a whole tale.

"Are they watching us, Tinker? Don't be afraid to answer. We shall trust you all the better if you are frank—I mean if you tell us all the truth."

"You no tell Cap'en Morgan, den?" he said, doubtfully.

"No—no."

"He kick and kill poor Tinker if you do when I go back to him."

"I bet you'll never go back," said young Jack; "if you are good and faithful to us, you shall stay with us and have a nice place to sleep in."

"And niceys to eat?"

"Yes."

"Me neber leave you," exclaimed Tinker, heartily.

"That's right; and so you had to spy after us?" Tinker nodded.

"Why you?"

"'Case Tinker get on widout making ob no noise. 'Case Massa Forster says Tinker's got such a deblish black carcass dat de sharp-eye ole 'Arkaway neber see him."

"Oh," exclaimed old Jack, "that's it, is it?"

"Yes, sar."

"So you have been following us all the way from Sidney?"

"Yes, sar."

"What for?"

"To try and catch all de niceys you got, sir."

"Very good—very good," said Harkaway, with a sly chuckle; "forewarned—forearmed. If they get their claws on our niceys, as you call them, Tinker, I'll give them leave to keep them."

"If dey get 'em, sar, dey keep 'em, and no ax your leave."

"Bravo, Tinker!" laughed young Jack. "You're not such a fool as you look."

"No, sar: more nor you, sir; not such a fool as you look."

"Now, I suppose, Tinker, that if we had got on a bit sharper, we should have caught some more of them as well as you."

"Yes, sir; on'y dey got 'osses, and dey got guns. Dey shoot de dogs, sar."

"Shoot the dogs?"

"Yes; dey no like dogs. Massa Forster says de fernal dogs spile eberyting; else he bag you—bag your missus—he bag all de bressed bilin'."

Dat's what Massa Forster say."

The listeners looked more and more serious, as word after word fell from the black boy.

It revealed a plot against them of a very serious nature—their lives were at stake.

Constant vigilance was the only thing which could save them from death.

* * * * *

"Jack."

"Yes, dad."

"I leave Tinker to your charge."

"Very good, dad."

"Be careful. Never lose sight of him. It is the most lucky hit you ever made in your life, to have got hold of him, for this has probably saved us from a deadly peril."

"You may rely upon me, dad," returned young Jack.

From that moment Tinker was ever in the presence of young Jack, or of his comrade, Harry Girdwood.

That night, before they ventured to retire to rest, they went the round of the camp, to post fresh sentries, and leave all secure.

Everybody, and, in fact, everything was used to insure their complete safety.

The two boys accompanied Harkaway on his rounds, and consequently Tinker was of the party likewise.

The bloodhounds were brought out by Sunday, and posted singly at different places.

In order to guarantee against their straying in the still hours of the night, a stout stake was fixed firmly in the ground, and a good long tether allowed to each.

The dogs growled a good deal at the black boy at first.

But they were quite pacified when they saw young Jack take his prisoner by the hand in a friendly way.

Then they smelt him about, and finally ac-

cepted a caress from him, which was given at old Jack's instigation.

"Good dog," said Tinker, eying him doubtfully all the while; "not eat dat."

"What?"

Tinker pointed to something on the ground which appeared to be exciting the attention of the hounds.

They looked closer, and found that it was a piece of meat, apparently a morsel of freshly-killed beef.

"Where did that come from?" said old Jack, in some surprise.

Tinker laughed.

"I put it dere, sar," he said, "special for dogs, sar."

"What do you mean by that, Tinker?" demanded Harkaway.

"Massa Forster, he tell me, sar, to put it down for dogs, sar," replied Tinker, "an' he put suffin nicey—nicey on it for dogs, sar; make um sleep, sar, so as dey neber wake up."

"Poison!" ejaculated Harkaway, aghast, "poison!"

"Yes, sir; make dogs sleep forever."

Every instant showed them some fresh symptoms more alarming than what had gone before.

"We were just in time," said Harkaway, savagely; "only just. Little did we think of this great danger which was overhanging us the whole time."

The dogs were placed at the three most dangerous posts.

Two were so tethered that they commanded the thickly-wooded place upon their left.

The third dog was left to guard the opposite end of the camp.

Young Jack kept Tinker at his heels the whole time.

In addition to these precautions they observed one very valuable rule.

A guard was mounted, and marched from post to post throughout the night.

Thus they avoided one very serious danger.

No more poisoned meat could be placed within reach of their faithful four-footed sentinels.

At length the camp was reached.

All was still.

All slept.

* * * * *

Bang!

The sharp crack of a rifle.

What was that?

Jefferson was on his feet, rifle in hand, in a moment.

Racing up to the place where Sunday was on guard, he found that vigilant sentry in the act of reloading.

"I see something dodging about over thar," said Sunday; "some skunk on the off smell, so I dropped him a pill."

"Did you hit him?" demanded Jefferson.

"Can't say that for sure," answered Sunday.

"I tried hard to; that's all I know."

The dogs barked.

The camp was all alive.

Harkaway and Dick ran up, rifle in hand, and in a trice they were followed by the youths and the black boy prisoner.

But it all came to nothing more serious than this:

One of Morgan's gang had probably been loafing about, hoping to pick up some news or information to take to his leader, and venturing too near, had served as a mark for Sunday's rifle.

Sunday was a capital shot by this time, and if he did not hit his man, it must have been uncomfortably near.

The guard was changed.

When this was done, the camp was left in peace and undisturbed tranquility till morning.

* * * * *

Whether Morgan and his band had taken alarm at the decided attitude of the party on the march, or whether it was that they had found occupation more profitable, we are not in a position at present to decide.

One thing is certain.

Harkaway and his friends were left to pursue their way unmolested from this night.

After a long and somewhat weary pilgrimage they arrived at their destination.

* * * * *

"Here we make our final pitch," said old Jack, planting a flagstaff in the soft, springy turf.

"Here we must start our new settlement."

"What name shall it bear?" demanded Dick Harvey.

"Don't christen it after me, my friends," implored the modest Mole.

"No, we will not," said Jefferson, laughingly; "much as you deserve it. Our new settlement shall be called 'Harkaway!'"

A ringing cheer greeted this proposition.

And by that familiar title is this now flourishing settlement known until this present moment of writing.

CHAPTER X.

HUNSTON'S ADVENTURES—"OUT OF THE TREE—INTO THE FIRE"—A LUCKY CHANCE—THE FIRE GOD—WHO IS BLOONA?—THE MAKE-FIRE—HOW THE MECHANICAL ARM DID HUNSTON A GOOD TURN.

HAS the reader forgotten Hunston all this while?

Surely not.

It would be fresh in the reader's mind that the wretched man, after traveling for weary miles through a desert waste of country which had been seemingly untrodden by the foot of man, had, when he least expected it, come upon a tribe of his fellow creatures, whose appearance was anything but reassuring.

A tribe of the Australian aborigines.

Upon their approach Hunston climbed a tree.

The savages, with many a wild cry, and with much noise and discord, marched up to the very spot, and encamped beneath the tree.

Here it was we left him.

He sat upon his perch, and shivered.

Not from cold.

Oh, no.

He trembled with fright alone.

The aspect of these people was enough to alarm any one.

They were the most hideous-looking members of the human race that you could look upon, and their ugliness was increased by the filthy paints with which their faces and their bodies were smeared.

The women got some dried twigs together, and a handful of yellow grass, with which they made a fire.

But as there was not the faintest breath of air stirring, the thick smoke from the fire arose in a cloud so dense, that Hunston was in danger of suffocating.

He dare not cough.

Yet the desire to do so was irresistible.

He was strangling.

He grew purple in the face.

His eyes grew dim.

With a gurgle or gasp he swayed to and fro upon his branch, and feeling his danger, he threw out his arms to save himself, but missing his hold, over he swayed, and fell plump into the middle of fire.

"Wa-hoo!"

The burning brands and twigs were disseminated among the assembly generally.

The first yell that burst from the savages was the signal for them to start back and seize their war-clubs.

"Wa-hoo!"

Hunston was momentarily stunned.

But soon recovering himself, he jumped up and shook himself from the burning twigs, and looked about him.

"Wa-hoo!"

This time "Wa-hoo" meant something more than a mere empty cry or savage yell, for the man that gave it sent a heavy missile at Hunston, which floored him.

They rushed upon him with the wildest and most alarming sounds, and seized him.

Hunston closed his eyes.

He thought nothing could save him now.

One of the women gave a shrill cry, which sounded like caree-ki to him, not that he had the remotest idea what caree-ki could mean, and thrust a burning brand upon his cheek.

"Hah!"

"You she devil!" yelled Hunston.

He jerked himself free under this torture, and gave the woman one terrific smack that floored her.

He got a good deal mauled then, and it would have gone even harder with him had not one of the savages, who appeared to be a man in authority, interfered on his behalf.

It was not humanity that prompted this interference.

The reason was that this chief being a little more intelligent than his fellows, felt his curiosity aroused by Hunston's singular entrance upon the scene.

"You talk white man's tongue," said he; "me talkee too."

Hunston seized upon this chance with great avidity.

"You are chief?"

"Yes."

"Then tell your people that they do wrong to harm me. I do not hurt them—I may do you good if you will let me."

"Good."

Then followed a consultation between the savages, of which, of course, Hunston could not understand one single word.

Apparently he convinced them, however.

"Where you come?"

"Up there," replied Hunston, pointing to his late perch.

"Good. My people think you are a bad spirit."

And here the chief gave a slight chuckle, which showed that he was not altogether devoid of intelligence.

Hunston had a lucky inspiration at this.

"Not a bad spirit," said he. "I am a good spirit. I come to serve you, and them too."

The chief turned serious at once upon hearing this.

"Good spirit?" said he.

"Yes."

"What spirit?"

Hunston looked about him.

"Fire god. You lit your altar there, and it called me down."

"What for?"

"To serve you."

"Where you come from then?"

"The sky."

"Where Bloona come from?"

Hunston had not the remotest idea what was meant.

But it was neck or nothing now.

"Yes."

This he communicated to his people.

An animated discussion took place, the issue of which was awaited by Hunston with considerable anxiety.

The savage chief turned to him with a serious air.

"You no fire god."

"What mean you?"

"If you fire god," said the savage, sternly, "de fire no burn you."

"It does not burn me," returned Hunston, boldly.

"Look!"

The savage touched him upon the burnt cheek, from which the scathed flesh was now peeling.

"Oh!"

He winced.

But he pulled himself together.

"On the face," he said, promptly, "yes, but not everywhere. Fire god burns on the face only just like you."

"But the body?"

"No."

This was the luckiest thought Hunston ever had.

His presence of mind now saved his life.

"See here."

He took one of the burning sticks by the flaming end in his mechanical hand.

"Good!"

"Wa-hoo!" cried the others.

"Wa-hoo" had to do service, apparently, for an endless variety of expressions in their native tongue.

"Do you see, O, unbelievers?" said Hunston; "I can with my hand hold this fiery brand without hurt."

"Yes—yes."

The savages yelled their approval in deafening fashion.

The self-styled fire god then, holding the burning brand by the flaming end, transferred it to his other hand by the unburnt end.

Then he bared his arm.

His mechanical arm.

"See here."

He rubbed the burning stick up and down the thick part of the arm and allowed it to rest there.

When the savages saw this they were filled with wonderment.

"You come from same place as Bloona?" demanded the chief again.

"Who the devil's Bloona,* I wonder?" thought Hunston.

But he answered readily in the affirmative.

"My people say," objected the chief, "that you can't be of the same race as Bloona."

"Why?"

"Because you are white."

"And Bloona is black?"

*The reader, perhaps, is asking the same question, but we hope, in more moderate language. Bloona is shortly to appear upon the scene; meanwhile, we may content ourselves with observing that Bloona is a person in whom the reader is sure to take the liveliest interest.

"Yes. You know Bloona?"

"Of course."

"Why she black, then?"

"There are white as well as black upon the earth, are there not? Why should there not be white and black up there?"

"Yes—yes."

This was seemingly unanswerable to the chief.

"You come to do us good?" said he to Hunston, presently.

"If you let me."

"You help us catch lots of game?"

"Yes."

"You shoot with make-fire?"

This would not have been very comprehensible had not the savage shown his meaning by pantomime.

He cocked his fingers into a trigger and imitated the firing of a gun.

"Yes," answered Hunston, "of course. Fire god does everything like that."

"Good!"

"But I have no gun."

"Gun?"

"Make-fire—gun."

"Hal! Good!"

He ran off, and reappeared in a minute or two with a rifle and a powder flask, and all kinds of modern appliances.

"Halloo!" exclaimed the fire god in surprise, "where did this come from?"

"Me kill white man with spear and take it all away," answered the chief, with pride.

"Humph!"

"Make-fire now," said the savage.

Hunston at once proceeded to gratify them.

The savages crowded around him as he loaded the rifle.

They had killed the owner of the rifle to steal it, but when they had got the treasure it was useless to them.

"What shall I shoot," said Hunston to the savage chief.

"That."

He pointed to a bird of gaudy-colored plumage which just then arose with a shrill call from the nearest tree.

Hunston was by no means a bad shot.

He brought the rifle to his shoulder, fired, and down fell the poor parroquet in the throes of death.

"Wa-hoo!" they cried.

And they all fell upon their faces around the wonderful fire god.

Hunston was once more in power.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE CHANCE—HUNSTON'S FORTUNES CONTINUED.

AND so it transpired, that Hunston's falling among savages was really the luckiest thing which could have happened to him.

He had from the first moment that he had been landed there by the Harkaway party, coveted the possession of a rifle.

Here, at one lucky stroke of fortune, his heart's desire was gratified at once.

And often he would look upon his mechanical arm, and smile grimly to himself.

"The legend on my arm does not seem to be verified for once. Why, it saved my life most unmistakably in this case," he would remark.

And so it had.

But was it not to reserve him for a fate more dreadful yet?

He lived for a considerable time with this tribe of aborigines, wandering with them through country after country, district after district, until one of the tribe came to them with the startling news that he had fallen in with a tribe of wanderers who were advancing straight in their direction.

This was not all.

The wanderers were not colored men like Hunston's companions, but whites.

Hunston watched the arrival of the white men with great anxiety.

"The white warrior they call Captain Morgan is there," said the leader of the tribe. "A great chief."

"Morgan? Who is he?"

"Fire god not know?"

"Yes, I know," said Hunston, in some confusion. "I know—I know, of course. What the white men call a bushranger."

"Yes—yes," said the chief of the tribe, quickly, "dat right. Bushranger. Captain Morgan, bushranger, great chief, big warrior."

Hunston was thinking very little of what was being said.

His thoughts were occupied by one sole question.

How to get off.

"I have it," he said to himself, "I have it."

"Much money, Captain Morgan," said the leader of the blacks. "Rich—gold—money—many cattle."

"You would like to have his cattle?" said Hunston.

"Could fire god get Captain Morgan's cattle away for us?"

"Of course I could," replied Hunston. "I go there and I charm it all away. All for you, then make fire all, everything. Shall I go?"

The savage chief nodded eagerly at this.

"Go—go," he said.

Hunston had some slight misgivings, as he approached the group of white men, as to the nature of the reception he might meet with, so he hoisted a handkerchief upon a staff.

Now, he had only just hoisted his flag when there was a visible commotion amongst the white men, and two rode out to meet him.

"Halloo!" cried one of the horsemen, "stand a bit—who are you?"

"A friend."

"English?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing with those black devils, then?" said the horseman.

"Camping out," replied Hunston; "firstly as their prisoner, and now as their guest."

He advanced.

"Stand!" cried the horseman, bringing his rifle up to his shoulder. "Advance another step and I fire."

"Fire?" quoth Hunston, not a little startled at this. "What for? I am no enemy."

"You are no friend," retorted the horseman.

"Why not?"

"No friend of ours is in the company of those treacherous black devils."

"But I tell you that they picked me up sick and weary of life: by an accident they were induced to spare my life. I practiced a trick upon them, and they, superstitious fools that they are, took me upon my own word for a fire god."

"A what?"

"A fire god."

Hunston then related in a few brief words his fall from the tree into the savages' fire, the lucky hit he had made, and finally how he had gulled them by the application of the fiery brands to his mechanical arm.

Now the part of his explanation concerning the mechanical arm seemed to strike the horseman singularly.

A strange, almost wild thought flashed through his mind.

He looked up suddenly, and spoke one solitary word to Hunston, which startled the latter.

What was it? A name.

"Toro."

Hunston jumped back a pace or two at the word. Did he hear aright?

"What did you say?" he faltered.

"I only mentioned a name," was the horseman's reply.

"Say it again," quoth Hunston, his voice nearly failing him; "say it again."

"Toro. Do you know the name?" asked the stranger, with a keen glance.

"I—of course—"

He pulled himself up short.

What if he should be running himself into a new danger!

Was it a snare? No!

Impossible—so he reasoned.

And while he reasoned thus, the horseman was watching him keenly.

"I see that you do know Toro," he said, "and I see, too, who you must be."

"I—I—"

"Yes, you are Hunston. You can't deny it. In fact, I don't see why you should deny it. You are Hunston."

"How do you know my name?"

The other smiled.

"I needn't enter into any long explanation with you on that point," he said, significantly.

And as he spoke he whistled for his companions, who stood aloof till now, to ride up.

And when they came the first of the party he saw was Toro himself.

Yes, there was his old comrade.

Toro in the flesh.

Hunston seemed in doubt for a moment, then exclaimed:

"Toro!"

Toro took one step forward, looking keenly at his friend.

"Hunston!"

"Is it possible?" ejaculated the Italian.

"Am I dreaming," said Hunston, in amazement, "or can I believe the evidence of my own eyes?"

A mutual explanation followed.

Fate brought them together by accident, or rather, by a series of accidents, after they had been parted by thousands and thousands of miles of sea and land.

"Captain Morgan," said the Italian, "I wish my old comrade to join us. You could not easily find a more valuable recruit. Will you have him?"

"If he wishes."

"And you, Hunston, old comrade—what say you? Will you join our band? You may travel from pole to pole, and not find a braver or worthier leader than Captain Morgan."

"With all my heart," was Hunston's reply. "Of all things, it is what I would have asked you."

"Agreed."

"Agreed."

"Your hand upon that," said the brushranger chieftain. "And you, my men all, draw around and swear him in. From this time forth Hunston is one of our band."

"And now that that is settled so well," said the Italian, "a word in your ear that will startle you."

"What is it?"

"What service are we engaged upon now, think you?"

"I know not."

"Have you forgotten an old schoolfellow of yours, that you have followed up since boyhood, and have sworn to kill?"

"What," cried Hunston, "you cannot mean that—"

"Harkaway is here," replied Toro. "He is traveling up the country, and we are tracking his party."

Hunston's eyes flashed fire at this intelligence.

"Harkaway here! Why, this is brave news, Toro, old friend. And so, after all, fate wills it that Harkaway should fall into my hands for my just vengeance. Yes," continued Hunston, clenching his hands tightly, "Harkaway, our reckoning is yet to come!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE NEW SETTLEMENT UP COUNTRY—THEY OPEN WITH A FAIR—MR. MOLE REJOICETH IN SONG—NIGGERS—THEATRICALS—SHOOTING FOR NUTS—THE FUN OF THE FAIR.

WITHOUT further adventures worthy of note, the Harkaway party reached their destination in safety.

And with them traveled their new prisoner-recruit, the black boy, Tinker.

"Here," said old Jack, planting his foot firmly upon the ground, "here I plant my flag. This is the beginning of Harkaway Town."

The rest of the party within hearing sent up a cheer.

"Hurrah for Harkaway Town!"

A log house was reared up in an incredibly short space of time upon this very spot.

They had everything to hand for the purpose, Timber there was in profusion for the labor, and there were plenty of willing hands, and tools of every description necessary for the task.

This was but the commencement of a series.

Around the first log house in which the Harkaway family resided, small but substantial tenements grew up as if by magic.

In an incredibly short space of time a small town arose in the midst of a wilderness.

At length, when the town began to assume an aspect of completion, some of the light-hearted members of the happy band proposed to inaugurate it with a fair, with the view of attracting to the place all the people of the neighboring stations or settlements.

Mr. Mole grew quite juvenile and uproarious as the preparations went on.

"We'll have swings, dear boys," said he, "and roundabouts, and cockshies, and shooting for nuts."

"And a troupe of niggers," suggested Harry.

"Yes," said Mr. Mole; "and, above all, an Old Aunt Sally, my dear boys."

"Of course."

"An Old Aunt Sally, of course," added young Harkaway.

A strange idea flashed through young Jack's mind at this, the result of which will later transpire.

Suffice it to say for the moment that it proved to be an unlucky hit for the worthy Isaac.

Now, as usual under the circumstances, Mr. Mole, in the excitement of the approaching festivities, took sly nips of strong waters, that soon produced a very marked effect.

He could not refrain from warbling a ditty

that had been rather popular in his younger days:

Yes, I own 'tis my delight
To see the laughter and the fright—
Such a motley, merry sight
At a country fair.
Some are playing single-stick;
Some in roundabouts so thick;
Maidens swinging till they're sick,
At a country fair.

"Ah," he went on to say, with a slight hic-cough, "there's a single stick, and—and—by Jove! I never thought of that. Who'll be clown for us?"

"Clown?"

"Yes—must have a clown, of course," said Mr. Mole.

"I'll tell you," said Harry Girdwood; "we'll have a clown."

"Who?"

"Tinker."

"Jolly notion!" exclaimed Mr. Mole, in his most juvenile manner. "A black clown, with white paint on his cheeks. Quite a sensation. Tinker will do."

"We shall have to get up a concert," said young Jack.

"I'll sing a song," volunteered Mr. Mole, at once.

"Comic?"

"He-he!" giggled the old gentleman, "not exactly comic. Something to tickle the general taste."

"Bravo!" said young Jack, quite convinced, apparently, that Mr. Mole would shine as a singer.

"And we ought really to have a booth for theatricals."

"Ah, a play—a play is the thing."

"I'll play a part, if you like," said Mr. Mole. "Romeo would, I think, suit me."

"Romeo. Yes, but we were talking of playing 'Hamlet,'" said young Jack, tipping the wink to his friend, Harry Girdwood. "What could you play, Mr. Mole?"

Mr. Mole's answer was given promptly and with pride.

"Hamlet."

"The principal character?" said Jack, with a start.

"Yes."

"That's settled, then. We'll get out the bills—I'll paint them—posters, with 'Isaac Mole'—in startling letters, three feet high—'Isaac Mole, in his celebrated character of Hamlet.'"

"We might add—'for this night only,' eh?" suggested Harry.

"Yes."

"That's settled."

"All we have to do, then, is to cast the rest of the piece, and to set to work to study for the tragedy."

"Stop."

"What is it?"

"How shall we manage the old business about Hamlet's stocking?" exclaimed young Jack.

"We'll cut that out," said Mr. Mole, with great readiness.

This settled, young Jack and Harry Girdwood left the old gentleman, to consult about one of the last suggested items in the programme of their fair.

Aunt Sally!

Young Jack had a notable scheme on for this.

It resulted from some information which he had accidentally come by.

This information leads us back some little way in our history.

It is, however, an important incident, for not only does it lead up to what ensued at their opening fair, but it also explains the meaning of some curious allusions made by the chief of the savage tribe to Hunston, concerning Bloona.

This the reader will, in all probability, remember.

But as this matter is of such importance, it deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHORT RETROSPECT—THE STORY OF BLOONA—WHO IS SHE?—YOUNG JACK DECIDES THIS—CONSPIRACY AGAINST MOLE'S HAPPINESS—AUNT SALLY AND ITS AWFUL CONSEQUENCES.

THERE was an old colored woman that travelled about the country from one station to another, who got a precarious living by a reputation for being a sorceress.

This old woman has a certain interest for all who have followed the fortunes of the Harkaway family and their companions, and therefore we request the reader not to skip the following lines.

This old woman was called Bloona. And thereby hangs a tale.

It was said that those who had known her longest, remembered her being landed at Port Philip by an English vessel, and that the sailors had a wonderful yarn about having picked up a balloon at sea, in the car of which there was but one living soul, and that she was very nearly dead.

Great care and attention upon the part of the ship's doctor had brought her around.

But for a long while her reason appeared to have fled.

She could not tell them anything of her past life, nor could she even pronounce her own name.

"Well," said the ship's doctor, who was a wag in his way, "we can't learn anything about our dusky Venus, but we can give her a new name. She may be a new specimen of the *genus homo*, come down in a balloon. We can advertise the birth—'Bloona dropped from the skies on such and such a day, latitude and longitude doubtful.'"

And so the name of Bloona, for want of a better, clung to her.

Now this old woman wandered towards the Harkaway settlement, and Harkaway happened to come into contact with her.

From the first moment that he saw her, he felt convinced that he had seen her somewhere before.

He had informed young Jack of old Mole's marriage in Limbi with two black women.

Jack thought he would convince himself about the matter, so followed up Bloona.

"Bloona," said the boy, "have you ever lived in other countries than this one?"

"Yes."

"England?"

She made no answer to this, but only gave a vacant stare.

She was harmless and very daft, although having frequent lucid intervals.

"You know what I say," pursued young Jack. "England—England, London."

A hopeless, blank look was all her reply.

"England, I say," young Jack went on eagerly, watching for a gleam of intelligence. "England, not Limbi."

This shot told.

She gave a start, and her eyes flashed fire at the word.

"Limbi? Ah, Limbi," she ejaculated. "Good Limbi."

"You remember Limbi?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," said young Jack. "I thought you would remember it presently, Ambonia."

She stared at him, then repeated the word "Ambonia."

Then she pushed her hair back off her face, and as old recollection, coaxed back by the mention of the name, rushed upon her, she gave a wild sort of cry.

"Ha—ha—ha!" she laughed. "I know now—Ambonia—Limbi—all—all—white husband."

When after awhile she relapsed into silence, young Jack thought that he would try her still further.

Still he felt convinced that he had dropped upon the truth from the outset.

She was much changed, yet he could not fail from what his father had told him, to recognize the long-lost wife of Mr. Mole.

He thought to test her by the name of her lost spouse.

"Do you remember, Ambonia, about Mole?"

"Mole—Mole," she repeated, several times.

"Yes—Isaac—"

"Ah, Isaac!" she ejaculated, with wild energy.

"Yes—yes, I know. Mole—Isaac—my white husband, my own warrior."

Young Jack grinned.

"Mole a warrior?" said he. "Well, he's not what I should call a warrior. However, perhaps it pleases her, and I'm sure that it doesn't hurt me. Isaac Mole."

"My own—my own!" called out the old woman, with wild energy. "Oh, take me to him, and let these arms clutch him tight—tight."

"Shall I take you to him?" demanded young Jack.

"Yes—yes; take me quick. I give him thousand kisses. He like me, I like him."

She seized hold of Jack and began to drag him about, leading him such a dance that he almost repented of having tackled her.

However, he got away at last, with the promise that he would bring the lovely Mole to her.

He went off at length, and found Harry Girdwood.

"Harry," said he, "I've got the biggest lark on you ever heard of."

"What is it?" exclaimed Harry, with eagerness.

"Who do you think I've found?"

"Found?"

"Yes, found, for she certainly was lost till now."

"I can't say, old boy."

"Do you remember all the story of my dad's adventures in the island of Limbi?"

"Yes, every word."

"And do you remember that old Mole got married there?"

"Very much married, too much married," replied Harry, with a grin.

"Do you remember that he had two black wives?"

"Yes, one died, and—"

He paused, gave young Jack a sharp look, and then ejaculated:

"You've never found his other wife that he sent up in a balloon?"

Jack nodded.

"That's it: the very same old woman that he sent up in a balloon."

"Get along; what, one of his first wives?"

"You've hit it, Harry," said young Jack. "She was picked up at sea in a balloon. Poor creature! she has seemed half silly ever since with the fright. Dad saw her by chance, and told me who she was like. So I have questioned her, and I have no doubt about it at all."

"Why, I scarcely believed in that part of the tale," said Harry, presently. "I half fancied that it was only a yarn about Mole having two wives before his present one, told to amuse us."

"Oh, no. Now for some fun."

"Now look here, Jack; we must take Mr. Harvey into our confidence, but not say anything to your father about it, or he won't let us have our full fun out of it."

"Agreed."

Poor Mole!

A disaster was in reserve for him indeed.

Dream on, worthy Isaac, while you may.

Dream on.

Presently you will awaken to a reality, which it will require all your courage and all your nerve to face.

* * * * *

The fair opened with a flourish of trumpets.

Young Jack, rigged out as a herald, blew a tara-ta-tara-ta.

Harry rang a big bell, such as railway porters are wont to deafen us with.

"Oh, yes—oh, yes—oh, yes," he cried, and declared the fair open.

There were hundreds of people from the settlements about that part of the country.

After a variety of swinging, and shooting for nuts, and cockshies, and other similiar recreations, they all started, accompanied by the noisy bell, to hear an entertainment given by an amateur troupe of Ethiopian serenaders.

Old Jack played the fiddle, Harvey was tambourine, and the corner men were young Jack and his comrade Harry Girdwood.

They had new songs, and new jokes and riddles, and altogether the troupe of niggers, who were known as the "Snowballs of Nubia," carried off the honors of the opening of the fair.

"Now, Mither Bones," said Tambourine, "whath the next thing on de programme?"

"De 'Wooden-Legged Warrior,'" responded Bones.

The song was greeted with the most uproarious mirth and applause.

* * * * *

After an endless round of amusements there came one of the chief attractions of the day's entertainments.

Aunt Sally.

"Aunt Sally you look upon as a rather degrading amusement for a man, I suppose, Mr. Mole," said Dick Harvey.

"I'm not above being amused by trifles, Harvey," said the old gentleman, with a condescending smile.

"And do you consider Aunt Sally in that light, sir?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you never had a shy at your black relative?" pursued Dick, artfully.

Mole smiled.

"Before you were born."

"Dear me," said Dick. "So long ago?"

"Yes."

"Capital," said young Jack. "I should so like to see you have a shy at the old gal, Aunt Sally."

"Good," said Mole, chuckling. "Good again. I'll go and show you a trifle in the way of Aunt Sally, unless—"

"Unless what, sir?" said young Jack.

"Unless my old hand has lost its cunning," said Mole. "Why, you'll hardly believe what I am going to say."

"That's very likely."

"What?"

"Nothing, sir."

"I thought you said—"

"No, sir."

"I'm very glad of it, for I don't like observations which savor of impertinence."

"I was going to say that when I was a young man—"

"What an immense long time ago that must have been."

"A century," suggested Harkaway, coming up.

Mr. Mole's nose curled up disdainfully.

"Such trivialities are really beneath my notice," he said. "When I was a young man," he added, turning his back upon Harkaway, "I was known as the champion Aunt Sally player of the world."

"The champion Aunt Sally player? Dear me!"

"I'll tell you what, sir," said young Jack. "I'll bet you a sovereign that you don't hit the pipe once out of the mouth of the Aunt Sally I will show you."

"What?"

"Not once."

"Bah!"

"Will you take the bet?"

"Of course, unless it is some catch, my young friend," said the old gentleman. "You mean to prevent me?"

"Not I."

"It is a trick."

"You shall have a fair field."

"And how many sticks?"

"Twenty."

"Why, with a quarter of them I'll smash the Aunt Sally you show me. I'll shiver it to a thousands atoms."

"Bet you a sovereign that you don't even touch it," said Jack.

"Done!"

Off they marched in procession to the Aunt Sally.

Our ebon relative stood at some distance from the line marked for the sportsmen to toe, and of this Mr. Mole complained at first.

But they calmed down even this with the assurance that it was the regulation distance, and that it, perhaps, appeared further than usual to him, because his sight was not as good as it had been once upon a time, a statement which he indignantly refuted.

Aunt Sally looked strange, very strange.

Instead of being the ordinary wooden doll perched upon a short pole or stick, it was a large black figure seated in a chair.

It looked like an old woman, and wore the orthodox frilled night-cap.

The most striking difference between this Aunt Sally and the Aunt Sally that we have all grown familiar with in this, the mother country, was in the pipe, or more properly speaking, in the way that the said pipe was carried.

Aunt Sallys, as we see them here, generally carry their pipes in their noses.

This Aunt Sally, more naturally, perhaps, yet more unusually, carried the pipe in her mouth.

Moreover, this Aunt Sally had not that rag-shop-doll look about her, which characterizes all the Aunt Sallys we have ever seen.

There she sat up, however, looking more like a black Guy Faux of the female gender than Aunt Sally, yet answering the purpose admirably.

"It is a precious long shy," said Mr. Mole, looking rather blue; "never saw anything like it."

"You want to be off the bet?" said young Jack hastily.

"No, that I don't."

"Go on then."

"Give me the sticks. I'll soon smash its nose."

"There."

"I shall not want all that bundle; half, a quarter will suffice, or I'll eat my head."

Confidence in his skill was shown in his voice, his look, and self-reliant eye.

"I'll bet you ten pounds more before you start."

"What?"

"I'll give you fifty to ten, Jack," said Mr. Mole.

"Fifty?"

"Yes, fifty to ten that I smash the pipe, knock its old head off, send it to smithereens, wherever that is, in one shot."

"Done."

"I'll take you on the same terms, Mr. Mole," said Dick Harvey.

"You shall."

"Agreed."

Mr. Mole stooped, and selected one of the sticks. Having picked one out, he poised it in his hand with the air of an expert.

"This'll do."

"Now then, sir," said Jack junior; "one—two—th—"

"Oh, dear me!"

Mole dropped his stick.

"Halloo!" exclaimed Harvey; "what was that?"

"It's very odd indeed, Harvey, my dear boy, but I fancied that the figure of old Aunt Sally moved."

"Moved? You must be mistaken, Mr. Mole."

Yet, strange to relate, the bystanders generally had shared Mr. Mole's fancy in this.

No one, however, said anything upon that side of the question, for Harvey appeared so withering in his sarcasm, that they did not care to incur its attack.

"You're not well," said Harvey; "something has happened to you. Try again, Mr. Mole."

"I will," said Mr. Mole, with an air of determination; "it was no doubt fancy."

It looked remarkably like a wink for fancy.

However, he took up the stick again—he had let it fall from his hand—and prepared to throw.

"One," cried young Jack, in a loud voice, "two—"

"Ha!"

"What is it?"

"Look there."

"I see nothing."

"What," ejaculated Mr. Mole, "don't you see the figure?"

The simple fact was, that at this precise moment, the figure of old Aunt Sally had moved.

The wooden old lady effigy had gravely taken her pipe from her mouth, and was nodding her head at Mr. Mole.

The latter paled with fright, as it were, and stood quaking with fear, and looking on.

"Look," he gasped, again.

Young Jack had looked.

"Ahem!" he coughed.

And immediately old Aunt Sally replaced her pipe, and resumed her statuesque appearance and attitude.

We said statuesque.

We might have said statuesque if not graceful, for graceful it decidedly was not.

"Whatever is the matter, Mr. Mole?" asked young Jack, seemingly irritated, after he had shot another glance at Aunt Sally; "I really can't understand."

"You can't understand?" vociferated Mole, furiously; "then let anybody else but you look, and see for themselves."

He pointed to the figure, and every eye was turned that way.

"See there, the dreadful old creature is wagging her ugly head at me," cried Mole.

He paused—stopped short.

Then he said:

"Look again, Jack, the figure is opening its large black mouth, as if about to speak."

"What is the matter?" asked the bystanders.

"What is it?" echoed Mr. Mole; "why, I am positive that I saw it move its mouth."

"Whose mouth?"

"Aunt Sally's."

"Bah!"

"You may 'bah,' said Mole, stoutly, "but I can trust the evidence of my eyes, and I can swear that it moved—opened its ugly mouth, and—"

Young Jack cut him off short in the midst of his speech.

"Don't talk nonsense, sir," he said, peremptorily; "if you want to cry off your bet, say so; only don't shilly-shally."

Mole was furious.

"How dare you—how dare you—you—you impertinent young jackanapes?"

"Now, don't call me out of my name," replied the boy, coolly; "not jackanapes, but Jack Harkaway, junior, at your service. Only don't pretend you can hit anything in the future. I forgive you your bet, sir, if you can't find the money; that's enough."

"I'll stick to my bet, and what's more, I'll make you stick to your bet; and if you get the best of Isaac Mole, why, I'll—I'll—I don't know what—damme!"

"Go on, then," said young Jack. "Aunt Sally's before you."

"Give me the stick."

As Mole took the stick, Aunt Sally took a sight.

"Ha!" shrieked Mole, "that ugly thing must be alive."

Then the stick fell from his hand.

The bystanders looked first at him, and then at Aunt Sally.

The old lady had dropped her pipe, and was behaving in a most unladylike manner at Mr. Mole.

There was no getting over this.

She was taking a sight.

At length Mr. Mole recovered his speech.

"She's alive—alive," shouted Mole.

There was no mistake about it, she was alive.

"Why," exclaimed one of the public, "it's an old black woman that has been gammoning us."

"Let's have her out," shouted another.

The suggestion was caught up eagerly.

A rush was made at Aunt Sally, and Mr. Mole was in that rush.

They dragged her off her seat, and pulled her up to where Mr. Mole stood.

And then—oh, then!

What took place?

Aunt Sally tore off her cap, gave a wild cry, and rushed at the dumb-stricken Mole.

"Isaac—my Ikey—Ikey," she shrieked, "my Mole, my own Mole!"

With which she threw her large black arms around his neck.

As Mole rested thus in her embrace, he noticed a strangely familiar ring in her voice, and his very soul quailed.

He was paralysed with fright at first, but recovering himself he struggled to get free.

But Aunt Sally was far too much for him when once she had fastened on.

She held him as if in a vise, and continued crying out:

"Ikey—Ikey, my own Ikey, my Mole, my own Mole, come to my lubing arms."

"Hurrah!" shouted the lookers-on in a chorus.

"Let go, you black devil," shrieked Mole.

"My Ikey—my Mole," vociferated Aunt Sally, "come and lub me."

"What does she want with the old gentleman?" demanded one of the crowd.

"It is my husband—my beautiful Mole!" retorted Aunt Sally, proudly. "I lub him—he lub me."

"Hah!"

A cry like that of a wounded stag burst from poor old Mole at these words.

"Get out, Sally," said someone; "why, he's got a wife already."

"Yes, and a black one," suggested another voice.

"My Ikey—my Ikey—only my Ikey!" cried Aunt Sally, again, in mixed anguish and affection.

Mole struggled to get free at the neck, and at length succeeded, but she held him still, although at arms' length.

"Mole—my own Mole—my pretty Mole!" she exclaimed, piteously, "don't you remember your poor wife who went up in a balloon?"

"Ha-ha!" from the crowd.

"Ho-ha! Up in a balloon!" cried Mole, in accents of mad despair.

"Your own lubly wife. Yes, dearest, I am forever your Ambonia."

"Gurgle—gurgle!" murmured Mole, in choking tones.

And then his wooden legs gave way beneath him, and he sank upon the ground with a groan of unutterable despair, saying:

"Up in a balloon, boys, up in a balloon!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MOLE TWICE WEDDED ONCE MORE—HIS FEAR AND HIS CUNNING—NO AVAIL—HOW HE GOT OVER HIS TROUBLE.

YES, there was no mistake about this.

It was Ambonia.

Mole's Limbian wife, that he had married years ago.

Old Jack knew it almost at once when he had come across her under the significant name of Bloona.

The explanation of that suggestive name had told him all.

Hence the secret of Mr. Mole's present trouble, for young Jack had arranged that Ambonia should stand as Aunt Sally, and by that means discover her lost Mole.

* * * * *

Need it be said that Mole's fright was something terrific?

You can imagine the poor old gentleman's agony.

Poor Mole!

This was a calamity which, of all others, he certainly had never looked forward to.

He had long regarded his troubles in the matri-

monial speculations in which he had been inveigled in the Island of Limbi as over.

Alas!

He soon discovered his mistake now.

He was rudely awakened to the fact that he was rather more married than ever.

Far more so.

When he reflected awhile about his black American wife Chloe, and he looked forward to her meeting with his long-lost Ambonia, he felt as if cold water, to use his own expression, were trickling down the small of his back.

"Mole! Ikey!" shrieked Ambonia; "come to your ole gal's arms agin. I lub you."

And she seized him in such a bear-like hug that she squeezed all the breath out of his body.

"Why don't you spoke to me, Ikey?" cried Ambonia, to whom the restoration of her long-lost helpmate appeared to give back her reason. "Ain't you glad to see your ole gal?"

"Yes—yes," cried Mole, in woful tones; "of course I am."

"Why don't you cuddle me up?" cried out Ambonia, in accents of bitter reproach.

She pitched her reproaches in such a high treble that Mole's alarm increased every instant.

"Dear—dear!" he cried, in distress, "I wish you would only draw it a leetle bit milder. I shall have Chloe here."

"What?" shrieked Ambonia. "What Chloe do with you? You my husband."

Ambonia fired up at the name of another woman.

"Eh?—nothing, my dear," stammered Mole, greatly perplexed.

"What name did you say?"

"N-n-nothing."

"Be golly!" said the dusky lady, eying Mr. Mole menacingly. "You said something about a gal."

"N-n-no."

"You did."

Her voice and manner struck terror to his very soul.

If Chloe should but hear!

The idea was too horrible to contemplate.

Now, just as this thought flashed through Mole's mind, Chloe's voice was heard close by.

Instinctively Mrs. Mole (number three) had smelt danger from afar, and she came running up to the spot.

"Isaac, my dear old man," she said.

"My dear—" began Mole.

"What you do here?" thundered Ambonia, in menacing accents.

It was getting warm for Mole.

Too warm for him.

"Who is that pusson?" demanded Ambonia.

"How dare you call me pusson?" cried Chloe.

"You're a pusson yourself, so there now."

And this she gave out as if it ought to silence the other lady on the instant.

Chloe didn't know the other lady, it was clear.

"Ikey," said Ambonia, in her most endearing manner, "Ikey, my lubby, if I find you have been a-lowering yourself by speaking to this strange pusson, you'll have to suffer for it, so."

And down came one hand on the other with great force.

Poor Mole closed his eyes in despair.

"Mr. Mole," said Chloe, with ill-suppressed wrath, "tell that nigger woman to go."

"Who are you, black ting, tell dis lady to go?" cried Ambonia, with great fury.

"Mrs. Mole, madame," responded Chloe, with a bob that was meant for a ceremonious curtsy.

Ambonia jumped up as if she had just received her death-wound from a gun.

"You Mrs. Mole?"

"Yes."

The other made no reply, but stepped back aghast.

Then recovering herself, she turned to Mole, and fixing him with her big eyes, she pumped herself up to a "white" heat, preparatory to opening fire upon him.

"So you got another gal, after sending me up in a balloon," she said. "You wretch—you beast! You get another wife. You send one up in a balloon, with nothing to eat while you get another! I'll teach you!"

And she was about to teach him as she promised, when Mrs. Mole the third stepped up before her.

And then Chloe stuck her arms akimbo and looked very big things.

They stared at each other fixedly for awhile.

And then Chloe said, in most significant tones:

"Well, mum?"

"Well, mum?"

"How dare you talk to my husband like that? Do you know that he's my lawful wedded, and that you're no better than a 'truder here?"

She meant intruder.

Ambonia was not critical as to a syllable, more or less.

She squared her shoulder *à la* Madame Angot, at Chloe, and "went in."

"You're a low, ignorant nigger," she said, "for Ikey was my husband before ever he heerd or seen you."

"Hah!" shrieked Chloe, "is that true, Ikey Mole?"

Poor Mole stammered, and tried to explain himself.

But in vain.

He could scarcely get out a word.

"Of course it's true," said Ambonia, "so come along with your own ole sweetheart, Ikey dear. Come to my arms, and me take care of you."

With this she darted around her rival, and seized her faithless husband by the arm.

At one tug she would certainly have pulled him off his pins, had not Chloe laid hold of him by the other arm, and held fast on.

"Come here," cried Ambonia.

"Come here," cried Chloe.

And didn't they tug?

Over went Mole one way, and then the other.

After a succession of see-saws, Chloe, being the younger and the stronger woman, gave one violent tug that jerked their victim off his feet.

Down he went sprawling, and up went his two timber toes.

This had a very remarkable effect upon Mole's Limbian wife, who now perceived for the first time the strange physical drawback of the husband she was struggling for.

What did those ugly wooden legs mean?

Ambonia remembered her Mole having two beautiful legs.

Mole, who in spite of his terror, was not exactly a fool, saw Ambonia's surprise, and was not slow to take advantage of it.

"This poor woman is altogether wrong," he said, as a last desperate venture; "she takes me for her husband."

"Yes," cried Mrs. Ambonia Mole, with great fury. "But what am these wooden legs for?"

"You see that she knew so precious little of me that this surprises her," said the artful Mole, holding up one wooden leg.

Ambonia was fairly staggered.

Mole went on.

Now was his time to follow up the little advantage thus gained.

"Hah, I see!" he exclaimed, hysterically. "My good lady, you must have known my brother—my twin brother, Isaac Ikey Mole."

"Your brudder?" cried Chloe, who couldn't see what he was driving at at all.

"Yes, my twin brother," said Mole, while Ambonia stared in silence. "We were so much alike that no one could tell us apart."

"Never."

"That's it," said Mole, "never! No one ever guessed anything of it at all. No one could tell which was Isaac or which was Isaac Ikey when we had got our trousers on."

The ladies shrieked.

"Disgustful!" cried Chloe, stalking away.

"Stop—stop, my dear," cried Mole. "I mean—that is, the only point of difference between us is that which you see. Isaac Ikey, my twin brother was born with his full complement of natural legs, while I—"

He sighed and pointed significantly to his wooden legs.

"You nebber born like dat," said the skeptical Ambonia.

"Oh, indeed," said Mole, "wasn't I? You look in the newspapers of the time, and the medical journals, and you'll see; why, the wooden-legged babe was the wonder of the age. So I tell you what," he went on to say, cocking his eye up at Ambonia, "you had better go over to England and find my brother, if you want him."

But Ambonia, though rather shaken, was not yet done with altogether.

"No," she said, stoutly, "one of us is mistook, dat's sartin, but tain't dis chile. Dat young pusson," meaning Chloe, "had better go over to England for de oder Mole."

Saying which, she made a grab at poor Isaac. It was now getting beyond a joke, so Mole's tormentors came up to the rescue.

They calmed the irate negress Ambonia, and they made her understand that although her marriage with Mole might have been all right, according to Limbian law, it would not hold good here.

Chloe, upon the other hand, was safely tied to the worthy Isaac by the Christian church.

This, and a bribe, with the means of returning to her native land being placed in her power, they contrived to get clear of her, but not before she gave Mole one tight embrace, saying:

"Perhaps me come back for you some day, Ikey, then me keep you all to myself."

Poor Isaac suffered more agony than will bear calm contemplation.

CHAPTER XV.

A HOLIDAY—LORD HIGH PROTECTOR MOLE—LOST IN THE BUSH—AUSTRALIAN SCENES.

MR. MOLE's game at Aunt Sally and its results formed a capital subject for conversation in the little settlement for some days.

Bloona, *alias* Ambonia, had for the time disappeared, though there was no knowing how soon she might reappear to claim her spouse.

Dick Harvey even suggested that she had gone to collect an army of the natives, by whose aid she could enforce her matrimonial rights, while old Jack suggested that perhaps she had gone down to Melbourne to appeal to the highest colonial courts to decide the question.

"Oh, Lord, there will be a pretty exposure if she does," groaned the ex-tutor.

"How so?" asked Dick.

"It will be reported in the Australian papers, English papers will copy it, and then all the world will know that Professor Mole com—ah!"

"Committed bigamy, you mean."

"That is an odious phrase, Harvey; however, be it so, and the world will laugh when it hears that Professor Mole committed bigamy, as you say, with a—a brace of black women."

"Besides attempting to win the affections of a Scotch-Greek monthly nurse," observed old Jack.

"Gentlemen," said Mole, rising, "your conversation is getting bold and impertinent. I leave you."

So saying, he stalked away.

Of course they laughed at him.

But they could not always laugh, even at Mole, and young Jack, with his friend, Harry Girdwood, began to long for some new excitement.

"Three or four days in the bush by ourselves, Harry. That would be the thing."

"Yes; I should like it."

"Then I'll go and speak to dad at once."

And young Jack rushed off.

"You'll get carried off by the bushrangers," said old Jack, in reply to his son's application for leave of absence.

"We shall be armed."

"No doubt, but you must not go."

"But Harry and myself are a match for a dozen; besides, we have not heard anything about the rascals for a long time past."

"You seem bent on going."

"We are, dad."

"You'll come to grief."

"You ought to have more confidence in the heir to your world-renowned name."

"You ought to have less cheek, youngster. Well, go if you like, but I insist upon your taking Sunday and Monday."

"And Tinker?"

"Why, no; I may want the lad."

"My dear Harkaway," said Mole, who had been listening, "I really think it would be better if I accompanied this expedition. I should be a protection against all dangers."

"Ha—ha—ha!"

"You may laugh—but surely you have forgotten how I vanquished the Greek brigands, and how in days of yore I slaughtered the countrymen of this benighted savage."

The benighted savage was Monday, who had entered the room, and who now joined in the conversation with:

"Don't you call names, Massa Mole—an' you nebber slaughter none o' mine countrymen."

"Though he married a few of your countrywomen, eh, Monday?"

"The conversation is growing offensive again," said Mole.

Young Jack, however, brought the conversation back to its starting point—his proposed excursion into the bush, and finally old Jack consented, on condition, as aforesaid, that Sunday and Monday should be of the party, and that they should all be thoroughly armed.

Accordingly the next morning at an early hour they started—five of them—in a kind of rude cart, with very strong springs, fit for the rough work it would have to encounter.

Their course was a northerly one, young Jack's object being to explore if possible a range of mountains said to be situated in that direction.

It was very sultry weather, although the sun was overcast with clouds.

However, they had a compass to steer by, and all went well.

For a time.

Long before noon Mole felt thirsty, and the

boys felt hungry, so it was resolved to take half an hour for rest and refreshment.

The meal ended, they resumed their journey.

Presently young Jack said:

"Those are not the trees we resolved to go to."

"Certainly not," replied Harry. "Where is the compass, Monday?"

"Compass, Massa Harry?"

"Yes, quick."

The compass, which they had already consulted twice, could not be found.

It was lost, and so were the young explorers.

A council of war was at once held, and old Mole, for a wonder, made a sensible proposition.

"We had better get on to those trees," said he, "and camp there, where probably we shall find fodder and water for the horse. To-morrow if the sky is clear, we can steer by the sun."

This appeared very practical, and they agreed to do so.

But their troubles were not over.

The axle of the cart snapped with a sudden crack, and all their provisions went rolling in the sand. Monday and Sunday hastened to extricate the horse from the shafts of the fallen vehicle, but as soon as ever it was at liberty, it bolted, and was soon lost to sight.

"What is to be done?" asked Mole.

"Take up our traps and walk," replied young Jack.

"Where to?"

"To that clump of trees where you proposed we should roost. So bear a hand here, Monday."

"All right, Massa Jack."

While the party were loading themselves, the trampling of many hoofs, the cracking of whips, and the shouts of men, caused them to turn their eyes in the direction of these sounds.

They were caused by a large herd of bullocks being driven homeward by the stockmen.

The animals, like all bush cattle, were more than half wild, and needed a good deal of force, as well as persuasion, to keep them in the forest track.

Some of them seemed inclined to make a rush at Jack and his friends, as they stood under the trees.

But a few cracks of the formidable whip from the powerful man in charge changed their intention, and brought them back to the ranks.

The men employed were four, of whom one, a native black, was on foot.

Jack's party hailed this opportunity of asking their way out of the predicament of being "lost in the bush."

But before they could do so, the principal of the new-comers addressed them.

"Halloo, mates!" said he, pulling up his horse, "where do you hail from? You've got bushed up, I reckon."

"We have indeed lost our way," answered Jack, "and have been wandering all day without sighting any bush-station, or so much as a shepherd's hut."

"Well, you're on the right track, anyhow. It's always safe to follow the course of a creek, for it's bound to lead you to some inhabited place in time; but we're going to steer straighter than that; if you'll join us you can have rest and food."

Jack and his comrades thanked him, and then asked:

"How far is it?"

"What, my hut? Close by, a matter of five mile. We'd be there in no time if it wasn't so hard to keep these cusses in order."

"Come up, you varmint!" he exclaimed, cracking his whip over one of the unruly bullocks, who bellowed with the pain and galloped away.

Jack and his friends couldn't help looking at that whip.

They had never seen such a formidable instrument in their lives.

The handle was not much more than a foot in length.

The lash was a terrible leathern thong measuring about twelve feet, and at the end was a silk "cracker," the sound of which was almost as loud as the roar of a cannon.

The man who carried this was a tall, handsome fellow of six feet, in a "colonial tweed jumper," or woollen shirt, tight trousers, and big jack-boots, while his embrowned visage and long beard and hair were shaded by a broad-brimmed, cabbage-tree hat.

He carried a knife and a revolver, and was mounted on a powerful black horse.

His companions were stockmen of an inferior stamp and appearance, the native Australian, a woolly-headed and bow-legged specimen of black

humanity, being apparently clad in the cast-off clothes of his master.

Jack and his companions were soon on good terms with the party, and the stockman was equally communicative.

"My name is Joe Freeman, and I don't care who knows it," said he. "I'm a native Englishman, like yourself, but I went out to California when very young, made almost a fortune at the diggings, ran through it, and then came here to get another. I didn't find it, though, and in the course of seven years I've been first one thing, then another, and now I've got the charge of the Gobberalong cattle run, on the Wimmeroo Creek."

"Gob—what was that you said?" asked Mr. Mole.

"Gobberalong; that's where I live. It's a native name; 'we've lots of native names about here. The next station's Bangaranga; next to that's Duckandilly, Coomang, and Bunyiparinga."

"Upon my word, they sound very pretty," said Mr. Mole, taking out his pocket-book. "The aboriginal language seems a very liquid one—full of vowels. Let's put a few of them down. How do you spell them?"

"I don't spell 'em at all," answered the stockman.

"This is part of the Wimmeroo Creek," pointing to the stream, which they were now leaving behind them. "It goes close by my station, and afterwards flows into the Wurree-Wurree River."

"Is all this under your management?" asked Harry Girdwood.

"Yes; our run takes up nearly all the Wangatoola plains and the Wurree-Wurree district. My governor, Major Durant, is one of the biggest landowners in the colony. He holds over fifty thousand acres of land, and has altogether two hundred and fifty thousand sheep, and close upon three thousand head of cattle."

"You do things on a large scale here," observed Jack.

"We do, slightly."

In this conversation they pursued their way through the open forest, into the still more open plains, until the stockman's residence came in sight.

The stockman's dwelling-place was a large hut, built of "slabs," or rough logs, of a mahogany color, with a roof of bark.

Near it were one or two smaller huts for the assistants, and buildings and enclosures for cattle stretched away in the back ground.

"This is the celebrated cattle station of Gobberalong," said Joe Freeman, with a crack of his whip, "and you're as welcome to it as a nugget to a digger. No ceremony, now."

And having dismounted, he pushed open the door and invited them to enter.

Inside the place was "rough-and-ready," but comfortable, divided into two rooms, one of which did duty for kitchen and sitting-room.

"This is my crib," observed Joe, "and I must leave you while we 'yard' the bullocks, when I shall be ready for something in the provision line, as I dare say you will. Pete, old boy, put on some extra rations, will you? Steak and damper for half a dozen at least."

At length driving in the cattle was accomplished, and the stockman, hot, dusty and exhausted, returned to his guests.

"There, I think we've fixed 'em all now," said the stockman, "and I'm ready for tea and dampers. Hope they're ready for me, Pete."

"Right you are, boss," responded the hut-keeper, "but I never dreamt as you had such a lot of company coming, and I've had all my work to make preparations accordin'."

"Sit around, chums," said the stockman; "all's welcome here. We don't see new faces too often to get tired of 'em. Well, I'm glad to say my work's done for to-day."

And sitting down in his chair with a sigh of relief, he took off his cabbage-tree hat, hunched his formidable stock-whip in a corner, and with Jim-along's assistance, divested himself of his ponderous jack-boots.

"Well," whispered young Jack to Harry, "this seems all very comfortable."

"Yes; but I don't mean to be deceived by appearances, I can tell you."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, I fear these men are friends of the bushrangers—in league with Morgan."

By the time all this had been said, the "dampers" were done, also some prime rump-steaks, "grown on the premises," as Joe Freeman whimsically expressed it.

"Not much fear of bushrangers here," said young Jack to Harry.

The tea was of the finest and strongest (coming direct from China), and for fear it shouldn't

be strong enough, the stockman "diluted" it with brandy.

"That's not a bad idea of yours, my friend," said Mr. Mole, seeing him do this. "Hand me the flask, please."

And he was soon clutching a formidable "leather bottell," containing at least a quart of the alcoholic liquid which, next to rum, was the object of his most passionate adoration.

"It corrects the rawness of the tea, you see," he explained, as he continued to pour it into the cup; "besides being in itself of a nourishing and stimulating quality, so much so, that the faculty in England have of late years administered brandy in all cases of—"

"Take care, sir," said young Jack, "you'll spill it. You're brimming the cup over."

"Dear me! so I am," said Mr. Mole. "It has half filled my saucer as well; but I can't put it back now. I really didn't mean to take so much; it was quite an accident. Never mind; there are worse misfortunes than that."

"A great deal worse ones—for him, I should say," whispered Harry Girdwood to Jack. "From his expression, he evidently enjoys the accident a good deal."

"Well, I declare!" cried old Mole, drinking the beverage out of the saucer with a loud 'swoop' of enjoyment, "if it isn't exactly like 'Robur, the new tea spirit!' Shouldn't wonder if this how it's made. Well, this suits me capitally, and I recommend you, my boys, to do likewise."

"No, thank you," said Jack. "I prefer my tea and brandy in separate parcels. They don't agree well when mixed. The very smell of it always puts me in mind of sea-sickness."

"What do you think, pals," said Joe. "I propose we all go out kangarooing to-morrow morning. A twenty-mile run or so after a 'boomah' you'll find good sport. Did you ever try it on?"

"Never," answered young Jack; "no more have any of my friends here, I don't think, have you, boys?"

Harry Girdwood replied in the negative, to which Sunday and Monday also added a disclaimer.

Mr. Mole, who was busily occupied in sugaring his tea, shook his head solemnly.

"It's the finest sport in the world," proceeded the stockman, enthusiastically. "Talk of your fox-hunting, with your kid-glove sportsmen in dandy clothes, and horses as smooth and tame as kittens, and all for chivying after a miserable varmint no bigger than a colley-pup! Give me a spell on one of our half wild bush horses after an old man kangaroo; that's your sort."

"Is there plenty of big game about here?" asked young Jack.

"Plenty of every game," answered the stockman; "kangaroos, dingoes, emeus, bustards, not to mention wombats, bandicoots, and the native devil. I could keep you well supplied with good sport if you were to stop here a twelve-month."

"But can you mount us all?" asked Harry.

"Mount you? Why, haven't you seen what a little lot of horses we've got in this station alone? My governor could mount half-a-dozen regiments of cavalry at a few days' notice to collect 'em."

"But they're all so wild," said Jack.

"Oh, we don't take long breaking 'em in by our system," answered the stock-rider. "We're rough and ready, we are, and I'll guarantee to take the nonsense out of the wildest colt in the colony under a week, unless he's got the very devil himself into him. But I always keep half a dozen good tame ones in the stable, and that will be enough for all of you."

"I'll tell you one person you'll not be able to mount easily," said Mr. Mole, "and that's me."

"Well, it will be rather a difficulty," the bushman admitted, looking at the ex-usher's wooden pins.

"I certainly do find it so in general, Mr. Freeman, I assure you," said Mole, "not from any deficiency in my equestrian capabilities—oh, dear, no; I could ride like Mazeppa himself, if I only had my legs."

"My legs," repeated Isaac, sentimentally, apostrophising the roof of the hut, "my unfortunate understandings. Alas, they are gone forever. I wonder where they are now, and what they are doing? How true it is that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder.' Oh, my poor legs."

And the veteran wiped away a tear just in time to prevent it falling into his cup of (branded) tea.

"I tell you what we might do, Mr. Mole," suggested Jack. "We could have you tied to the saddle, and your wooden legs encased in

jack-boots, fastened to the horse's girths. You couldn't fall off then, and you would have your hands free to guide the animal."

"Especially if mounted on some spirited and sensible crittur such as I can recommend," added the stockman.

"It mustn't be too spirited," said Mr. Mole, who had still some lurking doubt as to his riding powers.

"No; but such an animal as my mare Wildfire would suit you to an ace, you know."

"Wildfire! Don't like the name—sounds rather ominous," said Mr. Mole, shaking his head; "too spirited, I fear, for a fellow who's not so young as he was, and hasn't his proper quantum of leg."

"Well, now, I know a horse that might have been made for you," said Joe, "a quiet old nag called Milk-and-Water, from his mild disposition and his sort of sky-blue color."

"Milk-and-Water, eh? I like that better," said Mr. Mole.

"Not so well as he likes milk and rum, though," observed Harry Girdwood to Jack in an undertone.

"If it can be done safely," concluded Mr. Mole, "nothing will please me better than joining in the hunt. Reserve Milk-and-Water for me, will you?"

"Certainly, with pleasure," answered the cattle-keeper, with a half concealed smile about his countenance.

Mr. Mole having drunk another nice cup of tea, well fortified, now grew loquacious.

"Ah," he said, looking out at the wild landscape, "this puts me in mind of old times."

"What times?" asked Jack and Harry, in astonishment; "do you mean to insinuate that you have been to Australia before?"

"I did, my boy, I did," answered the veracious tutee. "I never told you of it, nor anyone else, for it's one of those things not generally known; but I emigrated during the gold fever, and stopped a year and a half."

"Why didn't you stop altogether?" asked Joe. "No use, you see. Rough times. I had some sport though; went gold digging."

"Harry," said Jack, aside, "old Mole's at his Munchausen crammers again."

"It's the tea that's done it," answered his friend.

"Find any gold in the diggings?" asked the stockman.

"A nugget, somewhere about this size, that's all," answered Mr. Mole, holding up a piece of damper the size of his hand; "worth some hundreds; but I got robbed bringing it home; and then I was sent out with a government party to capture two runaway convicts. I got separated from the others and met the two ruffians face to face in a lonely gully. We had an awful fight. I knocked down one and overpowered the other, and at last had the good luck to deliver them both alive into the hands of the government."

"A plucky fellow!" exclaimed the bushman. "And you got the reward, of course?"

"Two hundred pounds," replied Mr. Mole; "but I got robbed of most of that, too, and only had enough left to bring me back to England."

"Well," said Jack, "I am surprised. You never told any of us a word of this before."

"No, my boy: it was my modesty, you see—don't like to brag about one's own deeds, you know."

"Of course not," said young Jack, dryly.

"I'll tell you all about it," proceeded Mole, "but not now—not now. Don't feel very well, somehow."

Mr. Mole indeed showed symptoms of indisposition.

His face was red, his eyes bloodshot, his utterance rather thick, and his movements very eccentric.

"Mustn't drink any more Robur just now," he said, "too hot—pour it in the saucer."

In attempting to do which he blundered so that the liquid was spilt all over the table and floor.

"Dear me," exclaimed Mole, "what a pity! Beg a thousand pardons. I'll try to wipe it up."

And he half rolled, half threw himself on to his knees, and attempted to scrub the wet floor with his cabbage tree hat.

But the effort was too much, and he was soon extended at full length on the floor in a state of unconsciousness.

His last audible words were:

"Wipe it up—wipe up the Robur."

"Well, if he ain't far gone, I'm done!" exclaimed Joe; "and no wonder. I ain't got a weak head myself, but sugar me if I could take three cups of strong bohea half filled up with brandy, and be fit for much standing up after it. Is he often took bad like this?"

"Yes; he's unfortunately subject to these attacks," answered Jack.

"It's a bad complaint," said Joe. "I've seen a good deal of it in my time. Let's wrap a 'possum rug around him, and put him out of the way in a corner."

By this device he was not only securely folded up in the rug, but "toted" into the corner near the fire.

"There, old fellow, you're safe now," said Joe. "Chums, it's getting nigh roosting time; here's my nest," he added, pointing to the sheepskin rug which he had laid down in front of the fire. "In the room there you'll find a regular bed, which you young gents are welcome to."

"But we can't think of turning you out of your own bed like that," protested young Jack.

"Turn my grandmother! Do you think I ain't accustomed to sleep anywhere and everywhere—nowhere, for the matter o' that! One luxury, however, I can't do without, and this is it."

Taking out a briar-root pipe, he filled it with tobacco, lit it at the fire, and saying: "Good-night, chums; pleasant dreams," rolled himself up in his extempore bed, and proceeded to smoke himself to sleep.

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